PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

(HANSARD)

SIXTH SERIES—VOLUME 394

HOUSE OF COMMONS

OFFICIAL REPORT

SECOND SESSION OF THE FIFTY-THIRD PARLIAMENT
OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN
AND NORTHERN IRELAND
FIFTY-FIRST YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SESSION 2002–03

COMPRISING PERIOD
13 November—21 November 2002

£70

Cam/Ref

328

5/03

CAMBRIDGESHIRE

ISBN 0 215 65023 9

Chronology of The Parliamentary Debates

The Parliamentary History contains all that can be collected of the Legislative History of this country from the Conquest to the close of the XVIIIth Century (1803), 36 vols. The chief sources whence these Debates are derived are the Constitutional History, 24 vols.; Sir Simonds D'Ewes' Journal; Debates of the Commons in 1620 and 1621; Chandler and Timberland's Debates, 22 vols.; Grey's Debates of the Commons, from 1667 to 1694, 10 vols.; Almons Debates, 24 vols.; Debrett's Debates, 63 vols.; The Hardwicke Papers; Debates in Parliament by Dr. Johnson, &c. &c.

THE PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES commenced with the year 1803, and the contents are set forth in the following Chronological Table:—

HISTORY

CONQUEST TO 34 GEO. II.—1066 to 1760

Vol. 1 to 15. 1 Will. I to 34 Geo. II

1066-1760

REIGN OF GEO. III.—1760 to 1820

Vol. 15 to 35. Geo. III to 40 Geo. III.

1760—1800

PARLIAMENTS OF UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND IRELAND

(FIRST PARLIAMENT)

Vol.	35	41	GEO. III.	1801
—	36	42	—	1802

(SECOND PARLIAMENT)

Vol.	36	42	GEO. III.	1802-3

DEBATES

First Series

(SECOND PARLIAMENT—*cont.*)

Vol.	1 & 2	44	GEO. III.	1803-4
—	3 to 5	45	—	1805
—	6 & 7	46	—	1806

(THIRD PARLIAMENT)

Vol.	8 & 9	47	GEO. III.	1806-7

(FOURTH PARLIAMENT)

Vol.	9 to 11	48	GEO. III.	1807-8
—	12—14	49	—	1809
—	15—17	50	—	1810
—	18—20	51	—	1810-11
—	21—23	52	—	1812

(FIFTH PARLIAMENT)

Vol.	24 to 26	53	GEO. III.	1812-13
—	27 & 28	54	—	1813-14
—	29—31	55	—	1814-15
—	32—34	56	—	1816
—	35 & 36	58	—	1817
—	37—38	58	—	1818

(SIXTH PARLIAMENT)

Vol.	39 & 40	59	GEO. III.	1819
—	41	60	—	1819-20

Second Series

REIGN OF GEO. IV.—1820 to 1830

(SEVENTH PARLIAMENT)

Vol.	1 to 3	1	GEO. IV.	1820
—	4 & 5	2	—	1821
—	6— 7	3	—	1822
—	8— 9	4	—	1823
—	10—11	5	—	1824
—	12—13	6	—	1825-6
—	14—15	7	—	1826

(EIGHTH PARLIAMENT)

Vol.	16	7	GEO. IV.	1826
—	17	8	—	1827
—	18 & 19	9	—	1828
—	20—21	10	—	1829
—	22 to 25	11	—	1830

Third Series

REIGN OF WILLIAM IV. —1830 to 1837

(NINTH PARLIAMENT)

Vol.	1 to 3	1	WILL. IV.	1830-1

(TENTH PARLIAMENT)

Vol.	4 to 8	2	WILL. IV.	1831
—	9—14	3	—	1832

(ELEVENTH PARLIAMENT)

Vol.	15 to 20	4	WILL. IV.	1833
—	21—25	5	—	1834

(TWELFTH PARLIAMENT)

Vol.	26 to 30	6	WILL. IV.	1835
—	31—35	7	—	1836
—	36—38	8	—	1837

REIGN OF VICTORIA. —1837 to 1901

(THIRTEENTH PARLIAMENT)

Vol.	39 to 44	1	VICTORIA	1838
—	45—50	2	—	1839
—	51—55	3	—	1840
—	56—58	4	—	(a)1841

(FOURTEENTH PARLIAMENT)

Vol.	59	4	VICTORIA	(b)1841
—	60 to 65	5	—	1842
—	66—71	6	—	1843
—	72—76	7	—	1844
—	77—82	8	—	1845
—	83—88	9	—	1846
—	89—94	10	—	(a)1847

(FIFTEENTH PARLIAMENT)

Vol.	95	10	VICTORIA	(b)1847
—	96—101	11	—	1848
—	102—107	12	—	1849
—	108—113	13	—	1850
—	114—118	14	—	1851
—	119—122	15	—	(a)1852

(SIXTEENTH PARLIAMENT)

Vol.	123	15	VICTORIA	(b)1852
—	124 to 129	16	—	1853
—	130—135	17	—	1854
—	136—139	18	—	1855
—	140—143	19	—	1856
—	144	20	—	(a)1857

(SEVENTEENTH PARLIAMENT)

Vol.	145 to 147	20	VICTORIA	....(b)1857
—	148—151	21	—	 1858
—	152 & 153	22	—	....(a)1859

(EIGHTEENTH PARLIAMENT)

Vol.	154 & 155	22	VICTORIA	....(b)1859
—	156 to 160	23	—	 1860
—	161—164	24	—	 1861
—	165—168	25	—	 1862
—	169—172	26	—	 1863
—	173—176	27	—	 1864
—	177—180	28	—	 1865

(NINETEENTH PARLIAMENT)

Vol.	181 to 184	29	VICTORIA	 1866
—	185—189	30	—	 1867
—	190—193	31	—	 1867-8

(TWENTIETH PARLIAMENT)

Vol.	194 to 198	32	VICTORIA	 1868-9
—	199—203	33	—	 1870
—	204—208	34	—	 1871
—	209—213	35	—	 1872
—	214—217	36	—	 1873

(TWENTY-FIRST PARLIAMENT)

Vol.	218 to 221	37	VICTORIA	 1874
—	222—226	38	—	 1875
—	227—231	39	—	 1876
—	232—236	40	—	 1877
—	237—243	41	—	 1878
—	242—249	42	—	 1878-9
—	250 & 251	43	—	....(a)1880

(TWENTY-SECOND PARLIAMENT)

Vol.	252 to 256	43	VICTORIA	....(b)1880
—	257—265	44	—	 1881
—	266—273	45	—	....(a)1882
—	274 & 275	45	—	....(b)1882
—	276 to 283	46	—	 1883
—	284—292	47	—	 1884
—	293—301	48	—	 1884-5

(TWENTY-THIRD PARLIAMENT)

Vol.	302 to 307	49	VICTORIA	 1886

(TWENTY-FOURTH PARLIAMENT)

Vol.	308 & 309	49	VICTORIA	....(b)1886
—	310 to 321	50	—	 1887
—	322—332	51	—	 1888
—	333—340	52	—	 1889
—	341—348	53	—	 1890
—	349—356	54	—	 1890-1

Fourth Series

(TWENTY-FOURTH PARLIAMENT—*cont.*)

Vol.	1 to 6	55	VICTORIA	 1892

(TWENTY-FIFTH PARLIAMENT)

Vol.	7	56	VICTORIA	 1892
—	8 to 21	57	—	 1893-4
—	22—29	57	—	 1894
—	30—35	58	—	 1895

(TWENTY-SIXTH PARLIAMENT)

Vol.	36	59	VICTORIA	 1895
—	37 to 44	59	—	 1895-6
—	45—52	60	—	 1897
—	53—65	61	—	 1898
—	66—76	62	—	 1899
—	77	63	—	 1899
—	78—83	63	—	 1900
—	84	63 & 64	—	 1900
—	85—87	64	—	 1900

(TWENTY-SEVENTH PARLIAMENT)

Vol.	88	65	VICTORIA	 1900

REIGN OF EDWARD VII.—1901 to 1910

(TWENTY-SEVENTH PARLIAMENT—*cont.*)

Vol.	89	1	EDWARD VII.	 1901
—	90 to 100	1	—	 1901
—	101	1 & 2	—	 1902
—	102—117	2	—	 1902
—	118—128	3	—	 1903
—	129—140	4	—	 1904
—	141—151	5	—	 1905

(TWENTY-EIGHTH PARLIAMENT)

Vol.	152 to 168	6	EDWARD VII.	 1906
—	169—182	7	—	 1907
—	183—199	8	—	 1908

Fifth Series—Official Report

Lords Debates

(TWENTY-EIGHTH PARLIAMENT—*cont.*)

Vol.	1 to 4	9	EDWARD VII.	 1909

(TWENTY-NINTH PARLIAMENT)

Vol.	5 & 6	10	EDWARD VII. and 1 GEO. V.	 1910

Commons Debates

(TWENTY-EIGHTH PARLIAMENT—*cont.*)

Vol.	1 to 13	9	EDWARD VII.	 1909

(TWENTY-NINTH PARLIAMENT)

Vol.	14 to 20	10	EDWARD VII. and 1 GEO. V.	 1910

REIGN OF GEORGE V.—1910 to 1936

Lords Debates

(THIRTIETH PARLIAMENT)

Vol.	7 to 10	1 & 2	GEO. V.	 1911
—	11—13	2—3	—	... 1912-13
—	14	3—4	—	 1913
—	15—17	4—5	—	 1914
—	18—20	5—6	—	... 1914-16
—	21—23	6—7	—	 1916
—	24—28	7—8	—	 1917
—	29—32	8—9	—	 1918

Commons Debates

(THIRTIETH PARLIAMENT)

Vol.	21 to 33	1 & 2	GEO. V.	 1911
—	34— 49	2—3	—	 1912
—	50— 57	3—4	—	 1913
—	58— 67	4—5	—	 1914
—	68— 79	5—6	—	... 1914-16
—	80— 88	6—7	—	 1916
—	89—102	7—8	—	 1917
—	103—111	8—9	—	 1918

	(THIRTY-FIRST PARLIAMENT)				(THIRTY-FIRST PARLIAMENT)		
Vol.	33 to 38	9 & 10 GEO. V.	1919	Vol.	112 to 124	9 & 10 GEO. V.	1919
—	39—43	10—11 —	1920	—	125—140	10—11 —	1920-21
—	44—47	11—12 —	1921	—	141—148	11—12 —	1921
—	48 (2nd Session)	12 —	1921	—	149 (2nd Session)	12 —	1921
—	49—51	12—13 —	1922	—	150—158	12—13 —	1922
	(THIRTY-SECOND PARLIAMENT)				(THIRTY-SECOND PARLIAMENT)		
Vol.	52 to 55	13 & 14 GEO. V.	1922-23	Vol.	159 to 168	13 & 14 GEO. V.	1922-23
	(THIRTY-THIRD PARLIAMENT)				(THIRTY-THIRD PARLIAMENT)		
Vol.	56 to 59	14 & 15 GEO. V.	1924	Vol.	169 to 178	14 & 15 GEO. V.	1924

PARLIAMENT OF UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND

	(THIRTY-FOURTH PARLIAMENT)				(THIRTY-FOURTH PARLIAMENT)		
Vol.	60 to 62	15 & 16 GEO. V.	1924-25	Vol.	179 to 190	15 & 16 GEO. V.	1924-25
—	63—65	16—17 —	1926	—	191—201	16—17 —	1926
—	66—69	17—18 —	1927	—	202—212	17—18 —	1927
—	70 & 71	18—19 —	1928	—	213—221	18—19 —	1928
—	72 to 74	19—29 —	1928-29	—	222—228	19—20 —	1928-29
	(THIRTY-FIFTH PARLIAMENT)				(THIRTY-FIFTH PARLIAMENT)		
Vol.	75 to 78	20 & 21 GEO. V.	1929-30	Vol.	229 to 243	20 & 21 GEO. V.	1929-30
—	79—82	21—22 —	1930-31	—	244—258	21—22 —	1930-31
	(THIRTY-SIXTH PARLIAMENT)				(THIRTY-SIXTH PARLIAMENT)		
Vol.	83 to 85	22 & 23 GEO. V.	1931-32	Vol.	259 to 271	22 & 23 GEO. V.	1931-32
—	86—89	23—24 —	1932-33	—	272—282	23—24 —	1932-33
—	90—94	24—25 —	1933-34	—	283—294	24—25 —	1933-34
—	95—98	25—26 —	1934-35	—	295—306	25—26 —	1934-35
	(THIRTY-SEVENTH PARLIAMENT)				(THIRTY-SEVENTH PARLIAMENT)		
Vol.	99	26 GEO. V. and EDWARD VIII.	1935-36	Vol.	307	26 GEO. V.	1935-36

REIGN OF EDWARD VIII.—1936

	Lords Debates				*Commons Debates*		
	(THIRTY-SEVENTH PARLIAMENT—*cont.*)				(THIRTY-SEVENTH PARLIAMENT—*cont.*)		
Vol.	99 to 102	EDWARD VIII.	1936	Vol.	308 to 316	EDWARD VIII.	1936
—	103	—	1936-37	—	317	—	1936-37

REIGN OF GEORGE VI.—1936 to 1952

	Lords Debates				*Commons Debates*		
	(THIRTY-SEVENTH PARLIAMENT—*cont.*)				(THIRTY-SEVENTH PARLIAMENT—*cont.*)		
Vol.	104 to 106	1 GEO. VI.	1936-37	Vol.	318 to 327	1 GEO. VI.	1936-37
—	107—110	1 & 2 —	1936-38	—	328—340	1 & 2 —	1937-38
—	111—114	2—3 —	1938-39	—	341—354	2—3 —	1938-39
—	115—117	3—4 —	1939-40	—	355—366	3—4 —	1939-40
—	118—120	4—5 —	1940-41	—	367—375	4—5 —	1940-41
—	121—124	5—6 —	1941-42	—	376—384	5—6 —	1941-42
—	125—129	6—7 —	1942-43	—	385—394	6—7 —	1942-43
—	130—133	7—8 —	1943-44	—	395—405	7—8 —	1943-44
—	134—136	8—9 —	1944-45	—	406—412	8—9 —	1944-45
	(THIRTY-EIGHTH PARLIAMENT)				(THIRTY-EIGHTH PARLIAMENT)		
Vol.	137 to 143	9 & 10 GEO. VI.	1945-46	Vol.	413 to 429	9 & 10 GEO. VI.	1945-46
—	144—151	10—11 —	1946-47	—	430—442	10—11 —	1946-47
—	152—158	11—12 —	1947-48	—	443—456	11—12 —	1947-48
—	159—165	12—14 —	1948-49	—	457—471	12—14 —	1948-49
	(THIRTY-NINTH PARLIAMENT)				(THIRTY-NINTH PARLIAMENT)		
Vol.	166 to 168	14 GEO. VI.	1950	Vol.	472 to 479	14 GEO. VI.	1950
—	169—173	14 & 15 —	1950-51	—	480—492	14 & 15 —	1950-51
	(FORTIETH PARLIAMENT)				(FORTIETH PARLIAMENT)		
Vol.	174	15 & 16 GEO. VI. and 1 ELIZ. II.	1951-52	Vol.	493 to 495	15 & 16 GEO. VI. and 1 ELIZ. II.	1951-52

REIGN OF ELIZABETH II.—1952 to

Lords Debates

(FORTIETH PARLIAMENT—*cont.*)

Vol.	174 to 178	1	ELIZ. II.	 1952
—	179—183	1 & 2	—	... 1952-53
—	184—189	2—3	—	... 1953-54
—	190—192	3—4	—	... 1954-55

(FORTY-FIRST PARLIAMENT)

Vol.	193 to 199	4 & 5	ELIZ. II.	... 1955-56
—	200—205	5—6	—	... 1956-57
—	206—211	6—7	—	... 1957-58
—	212—218	7—8	—	... 1958-59

(FORTY-SECOND PARLIAMENT)

Vol.	219 to 225	8 & 9	ELIZ. II.	... 1959-60
—	226—234	9—10	—	... 1960-61
—	235—243	10—11	—	... 1961-62
—	244—252	11—12	—	... 1962-63
—	253—260	12—13	—	... 1963-64

(FORTY-THIRD PARLIAMENT)

Vol.	261 to 269	13 & 14	ELIZ. II.	... 1964-65
—	270—273	14—15	—	... 1965-66

(FORTY-FOURTH PARLIAMENT)

Vol.	274 to 285	15 & 16	ELIZ. II.	... 1966-67
—	286—296	16—17	—	... 1967-68
—	297—304	17—18	—	... 1968-69
—	305—310	18—19	—	... 1969-70

(FORTY-FIFTH PARLIAMENT)

Vol.	311 to 324	19 & 20	ELIZ. II.	... 1970-71
—	325—335	20—21	—	... 1971-72
—	336—345	21—22	—	... 1972-73
—	346—349	22—23	—	... 1973-74

(FORTY-SIXTH PARLIAMENT)

Vol.	350 to 353	23	ELIZ. II.	 1974

(FORTY-SEVENTH PARLIAMENT)

Vol.	354 to 365	23 & 24	ELIZ. II.	... 1974-75
—	366—377	24—25	—	... 1975-76
—	378—386	25—26	—	... 1976-77
—	387—395	26—27	—	... 1977-78
—	396—399	27—28	—	... 1978-79

(FORTY-EIGHTH PARLIAMENT)

Vol.	400 to 414	28 & 29	ELIZ. II.	... 1979-80
—	415—424	29 & 30	—	... 1980-81
—	425—435	30 & 31	—	... 1981-82
—	436—442	31 & 32	—	... 1982-83

(FORTY-NINTH PARLIAMENT)

Vol.	443 to 456	32 & 33	ELIZ. II.	... 1983-84
—	457—467	33 & 34	—	... 1984-85
—	468—481	34 & 35	—	... 1985-86
—	482—487	35 & 36	—	... 1986-87

(FIFTIETH PARLIAMENT)

Vol.	488 to 501	36 & 37	ELIZ. II.	... 1987-88
—	502—512	37 & 38	—	... 1988-89
—	513—522	38 & 39	—	... 1989-90
—	523—531	39 & 40	—	... 1990-91
—	532—536	40 & 41	—	... 1991-92

(FIFTY-FIRST PARLIAMENT)

Vol.	537 to 549	41 & 42	ELIZ. II.	... 1992-93
—	550—558	42—43	—	... 1993-94
—	559—566	43—44	—	... 1994-95
—	567—574	44—45	—	... 1995-96
—	575—579	45—46	—	... 1996-97

Commons Debates

(FORTIETH PARLIAMENT—*cont.*)

Vol.	495 to 506	1	ELIZ. II.	 1952
—	507—519	1 & 2	—	... 1952-53
—	520—534	2—3	—	... 1953-54
—	535—541	3—4	—	... 1954-55

(FORTY-FIRST PARLIAMENT)

Vol.	542 to 559	4 & 5	ELIZ. II.	... 1955-56
—	560—576	5—6	—	... 1956-57
—	577—593	6—7	—	... 1957-58
—	594—611	7—8	—	... 1958-59

(FORTY-SECOND PARLIAMENT)

Vol.	612 to 628	8 & 9	ELIZ. II.	... 1959-60
—	629—647	9—10	—	... 1960-61
—	648—665	10—11	—	... 1961-62
—	666—683	11—12	—	... 1962-63
—	684—700	12—13	—	... 1963-64

(FORTY-THIRD PARLIAMENT)

Vol.	701 to 719	13 & 14	ELIZ. II.	... 1964-65
—	720—726	14—15	—	... 1965-66

(FORTY-FOURTH PARLIAMENT)

Vol.	727 to 752	15 & 16	ELIZ. II.	... 1966-67
—	753—771	16—17	—	... 1967-68
—	772—789	17—18	—	... 1968-69
—	790—802	18—19	—	... 1969-70

(FORTY-FIFTH PARLIAMENT)

Vol.	803 to 824	19 & 20	ELIZ. II.	... 1970-71
—	825—844	20—21	—	... 1971-72
—	845—862	21—22	—	... 1972-73
—	863—869	22—23	—	... 1973-74

(FORTY-SIXTH PARLIAMENT)

Vol.	870 to 879	23	ELIZ. II.	 1974

(FORTY-SEVENTH PARLIAMENT)

Vol.	880 to 900	23 & 24	ELIZ. II.	... 1974-75
—	901—920	24—25	—	... 1975-76
—	921—937	25—26	—	... 1976-77
—	938—956	26—27	—	... 1977-78
—	957—966	27—28	—	... 1978-79

(FORTY-EIGHTH PARLIAMENT)

Vol.	967 to 993	28 & 29	ELIZ. II.	... 1979-80
—	994—1000	29 & 30	—	... 1980-81

Sixth Series

Vol.	1 to 12	30	ELIZ. II.	... 1980-81
—	13—30	30 & 31	—	... 1981-82
—	31—43	31 & 32	—	... 1982-83

(FORTY-NINTH PARLIAMENT)

Vol.	44 to 66	32 & 33	ELIZ. II.	... 1983-84
—	67—85	33 & 34	—	... 1984-85
—	86—104	34 & 35	—	... 1985-86
—	105—117	35 & 36	—	... 1986-87

(FIFTIETH PARLIAMENT)

Vol.	118 to 141	36 & 37	ELIZ. II.	... 1987-88
—	142—161	37 & 38	—	... 1988-89
—	162—179	38 & 39	—	... 1989-90
—	180—197	39 & 40	—	... 1990-91
—	198—206	40 & 41	—	... 1991-92

(FIFTY-FIRST PARLIAMENT)

Vol.	207 to 232	41 & 42	ELIZ. II.	... 1992-93
—	233—249	42—43	—	... 1993-94
—	250—266	43—44	—	... 1994-95
—	267—283	44—45	—	... 1995-96
—	284—293	45—46	—	... 1996-97

REIGN OF ELIZABETH II.—1952 to

Lords Debates			*Commons Debates*		
(FIFTY-SECOND PARLIAMENT)			(FIFTY-SECOND PARLIAMENT)		
Vol. 580 to 594	46—47 ELIZ. II.	... 1997-98	Vol. 294 to 320	46—47 ELIZ. II.	... 1997-98
Vol. 595 to 606	47—48 ELIZ. II.	... 1998-99	Vol. 321 to 338	47—48 ELIZ. II.	... 1998-99
Vol. 607 to 619	48—49 ELIZ. II.	1999-2000	Vol. 339 to 358	48—49 ELIZ. II.	1999-2000
Vol. 620 to 625	49—50 ELIZ. II.	2000-2001	Vol. 359 to 369	49—50 ELIZ. II.	2000-2001
(FIFTY-THIRD PARLIAMENT)			(FIFTY-THIRD PARLIAMENT)		
Vol. 626 to 640	50—51 ELIZ. II.	2001-2002	Vol. 370 to 392	50—51 ELIZ. II.	2001-2002

House of Commons

Alphabetical List of Members

[Returned at the General Election, 7 June 2001]

A

Abbott, Diane Julie (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington)
Adams, Gerry (Belfast, West)
Adams, Katherine (Paisley, North)
Ainger, Nicholas Richard (West Carmarthen and South Pembrokeshire)
Ainsworth, Peter Michael (East Surrey)
Ainsworth, Robert William (Coventry, North East)
Alexander, Douglas (Paisley, South)
Allan, Richard Beecroft (Sheffield, Hallam)
Allen, Graham William (Nottingham, North)
Amess, David Anthony Andrew (Southend, West)
Ancram, Rt. Hon. Michael Andrew (Devizes)
Anderson, Rt. Hon. Donald (Swansea, East)
Anderson, Janet (Rossendale and Darwen)
Arbuthnot, Rt. Hon. James Norwich (North-East Hampshire)
Armstrong, Rt. Hon. Hilary Jane (North-West Durham)
Atherton, Candice Kathleen (Falmouth and Camborne)
Atkins, Charlotte (Staffordshire, Moorlands)
Atkinson, David Anthony (Bournemouth, East)
Atkinson, Peter Landreth (Hexham)
Austin, John Eric (Erith and Thamesmead)

B

Bacon, Richard Michael (South Norfolk)
Bailey, Adrian Edward (West Bromwich, West)
Baird, Vera (Redcar)
Baker, Norman John (Lewes)
Baldry, Antony Brian (Banbury)
Banks, Anthony Louis (West Ham)
Barker, Gregory Leonard George (Bexhill and Battle)
Barnes, Harold (North-East Derbyshire)
Baron, John Charles (Billericay)
Barrett, John Andrew (Edinburgh, West)
Barron, Kevin John (Rother Valley)
Battle, John (Leeds, West)
Bayley, Hugh (City of York)
Beard, Christopher Nigel (Bexleyheath and Crayford)
Beckett, Rt. Hon. Margaret Mary (Derby, South)
Begg, Anne (Aberdeen, South)
Beggs, Roy (East Antrim)
Beith, Rt. Hon. Alan James (Berwick-upon-Tweed)
Bell, Stuart (Middlesbrough)
Bellingham, Henry Campbell (North-West Norfolk)
Benn, Hilary James (Leeds, Central)
Bennett, Andrew Francis (Denton and Reddish)
Benton, Joseph Edward (Bootle)
Bercow, John Simon (Buckingham)
Beresford, Sir Paul Alexander (Mole Valley)
Berry, Roger Leslie (Kingswood)
Best, Harold (Leeds, North-West)
Betts, Clive James Charles (Sheffield, Attercliffe)
Blackman, Elizabeth Marion (Erewash)
Blair, Rt. Hon. Anthony Charles Lynton (Sedgefield)
Blears, Hazel Anne (Salford)
Blizzard, Bob (Waveney)
Blunkett, Rt. Hon. David (Sheffield, Brightside)
Blunt, Crispin Jeremy Rupert (Reigate)
Boateng, Rt. Hon. Paul Yaw (Brent, South)
Borrow, David Stanley (South Ribble)
Boswell, Timothy Eric (Daventry)
Bottomley, Peter James (Worthing, West)
Bottomley, Rt. Hon. Virginia Hilda Brunette Maxwell (South-West Surrey)
Bradley, Rt. Hon. Keith John Charles (Manchester, Withington)
Bradley, Peter Charles Stephen (The Wrekin)
Bradshaw, Benjamin Peter James (Exeter)
Brady, Graham Stuart (Altrincham and Sale, West)
Brake, Thomas Anthony (Carshalton and Wallington)
Brazier, Julian William Hendy (Canterbury)
Breed, Colin Edward (South-East Cornwall)
Brennan, Kevin Denis (Cardiff, West)
Brinton, Helen Rosemary (Peterborough)
Brooke, Annette Lesley (Mid-Dorset and North Poole)
Brown, Rt. Hon. James Gordon (Dunfermline, East)
Brown, Rt. Hon. Nicholas Hugh (Newcastle upon Tyne, East and Wallsend)
Brown, Russell Leslie (Dumfries)
Browne, Desmond Henry (Kilmarnock and Loudoun)
Browning, Angela Frances (Tiverton and Honiton)
Bruce, Malcolm Gray (Gordon)
Bryant, Christopher John (Rhondda)
Buck, Karen Patricia (Regent's Park and Kensington, North)
Burden, Richard Haines (Birmingham, Northfield)
Burgon, Colin (Elmet)
Burnett, John Patrick (Torridge and West Devon)
Burnham, Andrew Murray (Leigh)
Burns, Simon Hugh McGuigan (West Chelmsford)
Burnside, David Wilson Boyd (South Antrim)
Burstow, Paul Kenneth (Sutton and Cheam)
Burt, Alistair James Hendrie (North-East Bedfordshire)
Butterfill, John Valentine (Bournemouth, West)
Byers, Rt. Hon. Stephen John (Tyneside, North)

C

Cable, John Vincent (Twickenham)
Caborn, Rt. Hon. Richard George (Sheffield, Central)
Cairns, John David (Greenock and Inverclyde)
Calton, Patsy (Cheadle)
Cameron, David William Donald (Witney)
Campbell, Alan (Tynemouth)
Campbell, Anne (Cambridge)
Campbell, Gregory Lloyd (East Londonderry)
Campbell, Ronald (Blyth Valley)
Campbell, Rt. Hon. Walter Menzies (North-East Fife)
Cann, Jamie Charles (Ipswich) *[died, October 2001]*
Caplin, Ivor Keith (Hove)
Carmichael, Alexander Morrison (Orkney and Shetland)
Casale, Roger Mark (Wimbledon)
Cash, William Nigel Paul (Stone)
Caton, Martin Philip (Gower)
Cawsey, Ian Arthur (Brigg and Goole)
Challen, Colin Robert (Morley and Rothwell)
Chapman, James Keith (Wirral, South)
Chapman, Sir Sydney Brooks (Chipping Barnet)
Chaytor, David Michael (Bury, North)

Chidgey, David William George (Eastleigh)
Chope, Christopher Robert (Christchurch)
Clapham, Michael (Barnsley, West and Penistone)
Clappison, William James (Hertsmere)
Clark, Lynda Margaret (Edinburgh, Pentlands)
Clark, Paul Gordon (Gillingham)
Clarke, Anthony Richard (Northampton, South)
Clarke, Charles Rodway (Norwich, South)
Clarke, Rt. Hon. Kenneth Harry (Rushcliffe)
Clarke, Rt. Hon. Thomas (Coatbridge and Chryston)
Clelland, David Gordon (Tyne Bridge)
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey (Cotswold)
Clwyd, Ann (Cynon Valley)
Coaker, Vernon Rodney (Gedling)
Coffey, Ann (Stockport)
Cohen, Harry Michael (Leyton and Wanstead)
Coleman, Iain (Hammersmith and Fulham)
Collins, Timothy William George (Westmorland and Lonsdale)
Colman, Anthony John (Putney)
Connarty, Michael (Falkirk, East)
Conway, Derek Leslie (Old Bexley and Sidcup)
Cook, Francis (Stockton, North)
Cook, Rt. Hon. Robert (Livingston)
Cooper, Yvette (Pontefract and Castleford)
Corbyn, Jeremy Bernard (Islington, North)
Cormack, Sir Patrick Thomas (South Staffordshire)
Corston, Jean Ann (Bristol, East)
Cotter, Brian Joseph (Weston-Super-Mare)
Cousins, James Mackay (Newcastle upon Tyne, Central)
Cox, Thomas Michael (Tooting)
Cran, James Douglas (Beverley and Holderness)
Cranston, Ross Frederick (Dudley, North)
Crausby, David Anthony (Bolton, North-East)
Cruddas, Jonathan (Dagenham)
Cryer, Constance Ann (Keighley)
Cryer, John Robert (Hornchurch)
Cummings, John Scott (Easington)
Cunningham, James Dolan (Coventry, South)
Cunningham, Rt. Hon. John Anderson (Copeland)
Cunningham, Thomas Anthony (Workington)
Curry, Rt. Hon. David Maurice (Skipton and Ripon)
Curtis-Thomas, Claire (Crosby)

D

Daisley, Paul Andrew (Brent, East)
Dalyell, Tam (Linlithgow)
Darling, Rt. Hon. Alistair Maclean (Edinburgh, Central)
Davey, Edward Jonathon (Kingston and Surbiton)
Davey, Valerie (Bristol, West)
David, Wayne (Caerphilly)
Davidson, Ian Graham (Glasgow, Pollok)
Davies, Rt. Hon. David John Denzil (Llanelli)
Davies, Geraint Richard (Croydon, Central)
Davies, John Quentin (Grantham and Stamford)
Davis, Rt. Hon. David Michael (Haltemprice and Howden)
Davis, Rt. Hon. Terry (Birmingham, Hodge Hill)
Dawson, Thomas Hilton (Lancaster and Wyre)
Dean, Janet Elizabeth Ann (Burton)
Denham, Rt. Hon. John Yorke (Southampton, Itchen)
Dhanda, Parmjit Singh (Gloucester)
Dismore, Andrew Hartley (Hendon)
Djanogly, Jonathan Simon (Huntingdon)
Dobbin, James (Heywood and Middleton)
Dobson, Rt. Hon. Frank Gordon (Holborn and St. Pancras)
Dodds, Nigel Alexander (Belfast, North)
Doherty, Pat (West Tyrone)
Donaldson, Jeffrey Mark (Lagan Valley)
Donohoe, Brian Harold (Cunninghame, South)
Doran, Frank (Aberdeen, Central)
Dorrell, Rt. Hon. Stephen James (Charnwood)
Doughty, Susan Kathleen (Guildford)
Dowd, James Patrick (Lewisham, West)
Drew, David Elliott (Stroud)
Drown, Julia Kate (South Swindon)
Duncan, Alan James Carter (Rutland and Melton)
Duncan, Peter John (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale)
Duncan Smith, George Iain (Chingford and Woodford Green)
Dunwoody, Gwyneth Patricia (Crewe and Nantwich)

E

Eagle, Angela (Wallasey)
Eagle, Maria (Liverpool, Garston)
Edwards, Huw William Edmund (Monmouth)
Efford, Clive Stanley (Eltham)
Ellman, Louise (Liverpool, Riverside)
Ennis, Jeffrey (Barnsley, East and Mexborough)
Etherington, William (Sunderland, North)
Evans, Nigel Martin (Ribble Valley)
Ewing, Annabelle (Perth)

F

Fabricant, Michael Louis David (Lichfield)
Fallon, Michael Cathel (Sevenoaks)
Farrelly, Christopher Paul (Newcastle-under-Lyme)
Field, Rt. Hon. Frank (Birkenhead)
Field, Mark Christopher (Cities of London and Westminster)
Fisher, Mark (Stoke-on-Trent, Central)
Fitzpatrick, James (Poplar and Canning Town)
Fitzsimons, Lorna (Rochdale)
Flight, Howard Emerson (Arundel and South Downs)
Flint, Caroline Louise (Don Valley)
Flook, Adrian John (Taunton)
Flynn, Paul Philip (Newport, West)
Follett, Daphne Barbara (Stevenage)
Forth, Rt. Hon. Eric (Bromley and Chislehurst)
Foster, Rt. Hon. Derek (Bishop Auckland)
Foster, Donald Michael Ellison (Bath)
Foster, Michael Jabez (Hastings and Rye)
Foster, Michael John (Worcester)
Foulkes, George (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley)
Fox, Liam (Woodspring)
Francis, David Hywel (Aberavon)
Francois, Mark Gino (Rayleigh)

G

Gale, Roger James (North Thanet)
Galloway, George (Glasgow, Kelvin)
Gapes, Michael John (Ilford, South)
Gardiner, Barry Strachan (Brent, North)
Garnier, Edward Henry (Harborough)
George, Andrew Henry (St. Ives)
George, Rt. Hon. Bruce Thomas (Walsall, South)
Gerrard, Neil Francis (Walthamstow)
Gibb, Nicolas John (Bognor Regis and Littlehampton)
Gibson, Ian (Norwich, North)
Gidley, Sandra Julia (Romsey)
Gildernew, Michelle (Fermanagh and South Tyrone)
Gillan, Cheryl Elise Kendall (Chesham and Amersham)
Gilroy, Linda (Plymouth, Sutton)

Godsiff, Roger Duncan (Birmingham, Sparkbrook and Small Heath)
Goggins, Paul Gerard (Wythenshawe and Sale, East)
Goodman, Paul Alexander Cyril (Wycombe)
Gray, James Whiteside (North Wiltshire)
Grayling, Christopher Stephen (Epsom and Ewell)
Green, Damian Howard (Ashford)
Green, Matthew Roger (Ludlow)
Greenway, John Robert (Ryedale)
Grieve, Dominic Charles Roberts (Beaconsfield)
Griffiths, Jane Patricia (Reading, East)
Griffiths, Nigel (Edinburgh, South)
Griffiths, Winston James (Bridgend)
Grogan, John (Selby)
Gummer, Rt. Hon. John Selwyn (Suffolk, Coastal)

H

Hague, Rt. Hon. William Jefferson (Richmond, Yorks)
Hain, Peter Gerald (Neath)
Hall, Michael Thomas (Weaver Vale)
Hall, Patrick (Bedford)
Hamilton, David (Midlothian)
Hamilton, Fabian (Leeds, North-East)
Hammond, Philip (Runnymede and Weybridge)
Hancock, Michael Thomas (Portsmouth, South)
Hanson, David George (Delyn)
Harman, Rt. Hon. Harriet (Camberwell and Peckham)
Harris, Evan Leslie (Oxford, West and Abingdon)
Harris, Tom (Glasgow, Cathcart)
Harvey, Nicholas Barton (North Devon)
Haselhurst, Rt. Hon. Sir Alan Gordon Barraclough (Saffron Walden)
Havard, David Stuart (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney)
Hawkins, Nicholas John (Surrey Heath)
Hayes, John Henry (South Holland and The Deepings)
Heal, Sylvia Lloyd (Halesowen and Rowley Regis)
Heald, Oliver (North-East Hertfordshire)
Healey, John (Wentworth)
Heath, David William St. John (Somerton and Frome)
Heathcoat-Amory, Rt. Hon. David Philip (Wells)
Henderson, Douglas John (Newcastle upon Tyne, North)
Henderson, Ivan John (Harwich)
Hendrick, Mark Phillip (Preston)
Hendry, Charles (Wealden)
Hepburn, Stephen (Jarrow)
Heppell, John (Nottingham, East)
Hermon, Sylvia (North Down)
Hesford, Stephen (Wirral, West)
Hewitt, Rt. Hon. Patricia Hope (Leicester, West)
Heyes, David Alan (Ashton-under-Lyne)
Hill, Keith (Streatham)
Hinchliffe, David Martin (Wakefield)
Hoban, Mark Gerard (Fareham)
Hodge, Margaret Eve (Barking)
Hoey, Catharine Letitia (Vauxhall)
Hogg, Rt. Hon. Douglas Martin (Sleaford and North Hykeham)
Holmes, Paul Robert (Chesterfield)
Hood, James (Clydesdale)
Hoon, Rt. Hon. Geoffrey William (Ashfield)
Hope, Philip Ian (Corby)
Hopkins, Kelvin Peter (Luton, North)
Horam, John Rhodes (Orpington)
Howard, Rt. Hon. Michael (Folkestone and Hythe)
Howarth, Rt. Hon. Alan Thomas (Newport, East)
Howarth, George Edward (Knowsley, North and Sefton, East)
Howarth, James Gerald Douglas (Aldershot)
Howells, Kim Scott (Pontypridd)
Hoyle, Lindsay Harvey (Chorley)
Hughes, Beverley June (Stretford and Urmston)
Hughes, Kevin Michael (Doncaster, North)
Hughes, Simon Henry Ward (Southwark, North and Bermondsey)
Humble, Jovanka Joan (Blackpool, North and Fleetwood)
Hume, John (Foyle)
Hunter, Andrew Robert Frederick (Basingstoke)
Hurst, Alan Arthur (Braintree)
Hutton, John Matthew Patrick (Barrow and Furness)

I

Iddon, Brian (Bolton, South-East)
Illsley, Eric Evlyn (Barnsley, Central)
Ingram, Rt. Hon. Adam (East Kilbride)
Irranca-Davies, Huw (Ogmore) [*By-election, February 2002*]

J

Jack, Rt. Hon. John Michael (Fylde)
Jackson, Glenda May (Hampstead and Highgate)
Jackson, Helen Margaret (Sheffield, Hillsborough)
Jackson, Robert Victor (Wantage)
Jamieson, David Charles (Plymouth, Devonport)
Jenkin, Bernard Christison (North Essex)
Jenkins, Brian David (Tamworth)
Johnson, Alan Arthur (Hull, West and Hessle)
Johnson, Alexander Boris (Henley)
Johnson, Melanie Jane (Welwyn Hatfield)
Jones, Helen Mary (Warrington, North)
Jones, Jon Owen (Cardiff, Central)
Jones, Kevan David (North Durham)
Jones, Lynne Mary (Birmingham, Selly Oak)
Jones, Martyn David (Clwyd, South)
Jones, Nigel David (Cheltenham)
Jowell, Rt. Hon. Tessa Jane (Dulwich and West Norwood)
Joyce, Eric (Falkirk, West)

K

Kaufman, Rt. Hon. Gerald Bernard (Manchester, Gorton)
Keeble, Sally Curtis (Northampton, North)
Keen, Alan (Feltham and Heston)
Keen, Ann Lloyd (Brentford and Isleworth)
Keetch, Paul Stuart (Hereford)
Kelly, Ruth Maria (Bolton, West)
Kemp, Fraser (Houghton and Washington, East)
Kennedy, Rt. Hon. Charles Peter (Ross, Skye and Inverness, West)
Kennedy, Jane Elizabeth (Liverpool, Wavertree)
Key, Robert Simon (Salisbury)
Khabra, Piara Singh (Ealing, Southall)
Kidney, David Neil (Stafford)
Kilfoyle, Peter (Liverpool, Walton)
King, Andrew (Rugby and Kenilworth)
King, Oona Tamsyn (Bethnal Green and Bow)
Kirkbride, Julie (Bromsgrove)
Kirkwood, Archibald Johnstone (Roxburgh and Berwickshire)
Knight, Rt. Hon. Gregory (East Yorkshire)
Knight, Jim (South Dorset)
Kumar, Ashok (Middlesbrough, South and Cleveland, East)

L

Ladyman, Stephen John (South Thanet)
Laing, Eleanor Fulton (Epping Forest)
Lait, Jacqueline Anne Harkness (Beckenham)
Lamb, Norman Peter (North Norfolk)
Lammy, David Lindon (Tottenham)
Lansley, Andrew David (South Cambridgeshire)
Lawrence, Jacqueline Rita *(Preseli Pembrokeshire)*
Laws, David Anthony (Yeovil)
Laxton, Robert (Derby, North)
Lazarowicz, Marek Jerzy (Edinburgh, North and Leith)
Leigh, Edward Julian Egerton (Gainsborough)
Lepper, David (Brighton, Pavilion)
Leslie, Christopher Michael (Shipley)
Letwin, Oliver (West Dorset)
Levitt, Tom (High Peak)
Lewis, Ivan (Bury, South)
Lewis, Julian Murray (New Forest, East)
Lewis, Terence (Worsley)
Liddell, Rt. Hon. Helen (Airdrie and Shotts)
Liddell-Grainger, Ian Richard (Bridgwater)
Lidington, David Roy (Aylesbury)
Lilley, Rt. Hon. Peter Bruce (Hitchin and Harpenden)
Linton, Martin (Battersea)
Lloyd, Anthony Joseph (Manchester, Central)
Llwyd, Elfyn (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy)
Lord, Sir Michael Nicholson (Central Suffolk and Ipswich, North)
Loughton, Timothy Paul (East Worthing and Shoreham)
Love, Andrew (Edmonton)
Lucas, Ian Colin (Wrexham)
Luff, Peter James (Mid-Worcestershire)
Luke, Iain (Dundee, East)
Lyons, John (Strathkelvin and Bearsden)

M

McAvoy, Thomas McLaughlin (Glasgow, Rutherglen)
McCabe, Stephen James (Birmingham, Hall Green)
McCafferty, Christine (Calder Valley)
McCartney, Rt. Hon. Ian (Makerfield)
McDonagh, Siobhain Ann (Mitcham and Morden)
Macdonald, Calum Alistair (Western Isles)
McDonnell, John Martin (Hayes and Harlington)
MacDougall, John William (Central Fife)
McFall, John (Dumbarton)
McGrady, Eddie (South Down)
McGuinness, Martin (Mid-Ulster)
McGuire, Anne (Stirling)
McIntosh, Anne Caroline Ballingall (Vale of York)
McIsaac, Shona (Cleethorpes)
Mackay, Rt. Hon. Andrew James (Bracknell)
McKechin, Ann (Glasgow, Maryhill)
McKenna, Rosemary (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth)
Mackinlay, Andrew (Thurrock)
Maclean, Rt. Hon. David John (Penrith and The Border)
McLoughlin, Patrick Allen (West Derbyshire)
McNamara, Kevin (Hull, North)
McNulty, Anthony James (Harrow, East)
MacShane, Denis (Rotherham)
Mactaggart, Fiona Margaret (Slough)
McWalter, Tony (Hemel Hempstead)
McWilliam, John David (Blaydon)
Mahmood, Khalid (Birmingham, Perry Barr)
Mahon, Alice (Halifax)
Malins, Humfrey Jonathon (Woking)
Mallaber, Judy (Amber Valley)
Mallon, Seamus (Newry and Armagh)
Mandelson, Rt. Hon. Peter Benjamin (Hartlepool)
Mann, John (Bassetlaw)
Maples, John Cradock (Stratford-on-Avon)
Marris, Robert Howard (Wolverhampton, South-West)
Marsden, Gordon (Blackpool, South)
Marsden, Paul William Barry (Shrewsbury and Atcham)
Marshall, David (Glasgow, Shettleston)
Marshall, James (Leicester, South)
Marshall-Andrews, Robert Graham (Medway)
Martin, Rt. Hon. Michael John (Glasgow, Springburn)
Martlew, Eric Anthony (Carlisle)
Mates, Michael John (East Hampshire)
Maude, Rt. Hon. Francis Anthony Aylmer (Horsham)
Mawhinney, Rt. Hon. Sir Brian Stanley (North-West Cambridgeshire)
May, Theresa Mary (Maidenhead)
Meacher, Rt. Hon. Michael Hugh (Oldham, West and Royton)
Meale, Joseph Alan (Mansfield)
Mercer, Patrick John (Newark)
Merron, Gillian Joanna (Lincoln)
Michael, Rt. Hon. Alun Edward (Cardiff, South and Penarth)
Milburn, Rt. Hon. Alan (Darlington)
Miliband, David Wright (South Shields)
Miller, Andrew Peter (Ellesmere Port and Neston)
Mitchell, Andrew John Bower (Sutton Coldfield)
Mitchell, Austin Vernon (Great Grimsby)
Moffatt, Laura Jean (Crawley)
Mole, Chris (Ipswich) [*By-election, November 2001*]
Moonie, Lewis George (Kirkcaldy)
Moore, Michael Kevin (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale)
Moran, Margaret (Luton, South)
Morgan, Julie (Cardiff, North)
Morley, Elliot Anthony (Scunthorpe)
Morris, Rt. Hon. Estelle (Birmingham, Yardley)
Moss, Malcolm Douglas (North-East Cambridgeshire)
Mountford, Kali Carol Jean (Colne Valley)
Mudie, George Edward (Leeds, East)
Mullin, Christopher John (Sunderland, South)
Munn, Margaret Patricia (Sheffield, Heeley)
Murphy, Denis (Wansbeck)
Murphy, Jim (Eastwood)
Murphy, Rt. Hon. Paul Peter (Torfaen)
Murrison, Andrew William (Westbury)

N

Naysmith, John Douglas (Bristol, North-West)
Norman, Archibald John (Tunbridge Wells)
Norris, Dan (Wansdyke)

O

Oaten, Mark (Winchester)
O'Brien, Michael (North Warwickshire)
O'Brien, Stephen Rothwell (Eddisbury)
O'Brien, William (Normanton)
O'Hara, Edward (Knowsley, South)
Olner, William John (Nuneaton)
O'Neill, Martin John (Ochil)
O'pik, Lembit (Montgomeryshire)
Organ, Diana Mary (Forest of Dean)
Osborne, George Gideon Oliver (Tatton)
Osborne, Sandra (Ayr)
Ottaway, Richard Geoffrey James (Croydon, South)
Owen, Albert (Ynys Mo|n)

P

Page, Richard Lewis (South-West Hertfordshire)
Paice, James Edward Thornton (South-East Cambridgeshire)
Paisley, The Reverend Ian Richard Kyle (North Antrim)
Palmer, Nicholas Douglas (Broxtowe)
Paterson, Owen William (North Shropshire)
Pearson, Ian Phares (Dudley, South)
Perham, Linda (Ilford, North)
Picking, Anne (East Lothian)
Pickles, Eric Jack (Brentwood and Ongar)
Pickthall, Colin (West Lancashire)
Pike, Peter Leslie (Burnley)
Plaskitt, James Andrew (Warwick and Leamington)
Pollard, Kerry Patrick (St. Albans)
Pond, Christopher Richard (Gravesham)
Pope, Gregory James (Hyndburn)
Portillo, Rt. Hon. Michael Denzil Xavier (Kensington and Chelsea)
Pound, Stephen Pelham (Ealing, North)
Powell, Sir Raymond (Ogmore) [*died, December 2001*]
Prentice, Bridget (Lewisham, East)
Prentice, Gordon (Pendle)
Prescott, Rt. Hon. John Leslie (Hull, East)
Price, Adam (East Carmarthen and Dinefwr)
Primarolo, Dawn (Bristol, South)
Prisk, Mark (Hertford and Stortford)
Prosser, Gwynfor Mathews (Dover)
Pugh, John David (Southport)
Purchase, Kenneth (Wolverhampton, North-East)
Purnell, James Mark Dakin (Stalybridge and Hyde)

Q

Quin, Rt. Hon. Joyce Gwendolen (Gateshead, East and Washington, West)
Quinn, Lawrence William (Scarborough and Whitby)

R

Rammell, William Ernest (Harlow)
Randall, Alexander John (Uxbridge)
Rapson, Sydney Norman John (Portsmouth, North)
Raynsford, Rt. Hon. Wyvill Richard Nicolls (Greenwich and Woolwich)
Redwood, Rt. Hon. John Alan (Wokingham)
Reed, Andrew John (Loughborough)
Reid, Alan (Argyll and Bute)
Reid, Rt. Hon. John (Hamilton, North and Bellshill)
Rendel, David Digby (Newbury)
Robathan, Andrew Robert George (Blaby)
Robertson, Angus (Moray)
Robertson, Hugh (Faversham and Mid-Kent)
Robertson, John (Glasgow, Anniesland)
Robertson, Laurence Anthony (Tewkesbury)
Robinson, Geoffrey (Coventry, North-West)
Robinson, Iris (Strangford)
Robinson, Peter David (Belfast, East)
Roche, Barbara Maureen (Hornsey and Wood Green)
Roe, Marion Audrey (Broxbourne)
Rooney, Terence Henry (Bradford, North)
Rosindell, Andrew Richard (Romford)
Ross, Ernest (Dundee, West)
Roy, Frank (Motherwell and Wishaw)
Ruane, Christopher Shaun (Vale of Clwyd)
Ruddock, Joan Mary (Lewisham, Deptford)
Ruffley, David Laurie (Bury St. Edmunds)
Russell, Christine Margaret (City of Chester)
Russell, Robert Edward (Colchester)
Ryan, Joan Marie (Enfield, North)

S

Salmond, Alex Elliot Anderson (Banff and Buchan)
Salter, Martin John (Reading, West)
Sanders, Adrian Mark (Torbay)
Sarwar, Mohammad (Glasgow, Govan)
Savidge, Malcolm Kemp (Aberdeen, North)
Sawford, Philip Andrew (Kettering)
Sayeed, Jonathan (Mid-Bedfordshire)
Sedgemore, Brian Charles John (Hackney, South and Shoreditch)
Selous, Andrew Edmund Armstrong (South-West Bedfordshire)
Shaw, Jonathan Rowland (Chatham and Aylesford)
Sheerman, Barry (Huddersfield)
Shephard, Rt. Hon. Gillian Patricia (South-West Norfolk)
Shepherd, Richard Charles Scrimgeour (Aldridge-Brownhills)
Sheridan, James (West Renfrewshire)
Shipley, Debra Ann (Stourbridge)
Short, Rt. Hon. Clare (Birmingham, Ladywood)
Simmonds, Mark Jonathon Mortlock (Boston and Skegness)
Simon, Siôn Llewelyn (Birmingham, Erdington)
Simpson, Alan John (Nottingham, South)
Simpson, Keith Robert (Mid-Norfolk)
Singh, Marsha (Bradford, West)
Skinner, Dennis Edward (Bolsover)
Smith, Rt. Hon. Andrew David (Oxford, East)
Smith, Angela Evans (Basildon)
Smith, Rt. Hon. Christopher Robert (Islington, South and Finsbury)
Smith, Geraldine (Morecambe and Lunesdale)
Smith, Jacqueline Jill (Redditch)
Smith, John William Patrick (Vale of Glamorgan)
Smith, Llewellyn Thomas (Blaenau Gwent)
Smith, Sir Robert (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine)
Smyth, The Reverend William Martin (Belfast, South)
Soames, Arthur Nicholas Winston (Mid-Sussex)
Soley, Clive Stafford (Ealing, Acton and Shepherd's Bush)
Southworth, Helen Mary (Warrington, South)
Spellar, John Francis (Warley)
Spelman, Caroline Alice (Meriden)
Spicer, Sir Michael William Hardy (West Worcestershire)
Spink, Robert Michael (Castle Point)
Spring, Richard John Grenville (West Suffolk)
Squire, Rachel Anne (Dunfermline, West)
Stanley, Rt. Hon. Sir John Paul (Tonbridge and Malling)
Starkey, Phyllis Margaret (Milton Keynes, South-West)
Steen, Anthony David (Totnes)
Steinberg, Gerald Neil (City of Durham)
Stevenson, George William (Stoke-on-Trent, South)
Stewart, David John (Inverness East, Nairn and Lochaber)
Stewart, Ian (Eccles)
Stinchcombe, Paul David (Wellingborough)
Stoate, Howard Geoffrey Alvan (Dartford)
Strang, Rt. Hon. Gavin Steel (Edinburgh, East and Musselburgh)
Straw, Rt. Hon. John Whitaker (Blackburn)
Streeter, Gary Nicholas (South-West Devon)
Stringer, Graham Eric (Manchester, Blackley)
Stuart, Gisela Gschaider (Birmingham, Edgbaston)
Stunell, Andrew (Hazel Grove)
Sutcliffe, Gerald (Bradford, South)
Swayne, Desmond Angus (New Forest, West)

Swire, Hugo (East Devon)
Syms, Robert Andrew Raymond (Poole)

T

Tami, Mark Richard (Alyn and Deeside)
Tapsell, Sir Peter Hannay Bailey (Louth and Horncastle)
Taylor, Dari Jean (Stockton, South)
Taylor, David Leslie (North-West Leicestershire)
Taylor, Sir Edward MacMillan (Rochford and Southend, East)
Taylor, Ian Colin (Esher and Walton)
Taylor, John Mark (Solihull)
Taylor, Matthew Owen John (Truro and St. Austell)
Taylor, Richard Thomas (Wyre Forest)
Taylor, Rt. Hon. Winifred Ann (Dewsbury)
Thomas, Gareth (Clwyd, West)
Thomas, Gareth Richard (Harrow, West)
Thomas, Simon (Ceredigion)
Thurso, Viscount John Archibald (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross)
Timms, Stephen Creswell (East Ham)
Tipping, Simon Patrick (Sherwood)
Todd, Mark Wainwright (South Derbyshire)
Tonge, Jennifer Louise (Richmond Park)
Touhig, James Donnelly (Islwyn)
Tredinnick, David Arthur Stephen (Bosworth)
Trend, Michael St. John (Windsor)
Trickett, Jon Hedley (Hemsworth)
Trimble, Rt. Hon. David (Upper Bann)
Truswell, Paul Anthony (Pudsey)
Turner, Andrew John (Isle of Wight)
Turner, Dennis (Wolverhampton, South-East)
Turner, Desmond Stanley (Brighton, Kemptown)
Turner, Neil (Wigan)
Twigg, John Derek (Halton)
Twigg, Stephen (Enfield, Southgate)
Tyler, Paul (North Cornwall)
Tynan, William (Hamilton, South)
Tyrie, Andrew Guy (Chichester)

V

Vaz, Keith (Leicester, East)
Viggers, Peter John (Gosport)
Vis, Rudi Jan (Finchley and Golders Green)

W

Walley, Joan Lorraine (Stoke-on-Trent, North)
Walter, Robert John (North Dorset)
Ward, Claire (Watford)
Wareing, Robert Nelson (Liverpool, West Derby)
Waterson, Nigel Christopher (Eastbourne)
Watkinson, Angela Eileen (Upminster)
Watson, Thomas Anthony (West Bromwich, East)
Watts, David Leonard (St Helens, North)
Webb, Steven John (Northavon)
Weir, Michael Fraser (Angus)
White, Brian Arthur Robert (Milton Keynes, North-East)
Whitehead, Alan Patrick Vincent (Southampton, Test)
Whittingdale, John Flasby Lawrance (Maldon and East Chelmsford)
Wicks, Malcolm Hunt (Croydon, North)
Widdecombe, Rt. Hon. Ann Noreen (Maidstone and The Weald)
Wiggin, William David (Leominster)
Wilkinson, John Arbuthnot Du Cane (Ruislip-Northwood)
Willetts, David Lindsay (Havant)
Williams, Rt. Hon. Alan John (Swansea, West)
Williams, Betty Helena (Conwy)
Williams, Hywel (Caernarfon)
Williams, Roger Hugh (Brecon and Radnorshire)
Willis, George Philip (Harrogate and Knaresborough)
Wills, Michael David (North Swindon)
Wilshire, David (Spelthorne)
Wilson, Brian (Cunninghame, North)
Winnick, David Julian (Walsall, North)
Winterton, Jane Ann (Congleton)
Winterton, Nicholas Raymond (Macclesfield)
Winterton, Rosalie (Doncaster, Central)
Wishart, Peter (North Tayside)
Wood, Mike (Batley and Spen)
Woodward, Shaun Anthony (St. Helens, South)
Woolas, Philip James (Oldham, East and Saddleworth)
Worthington, William Anthony (Clydebank and Milngavie)
Wray, Jimmy (Glasgow, Baillieston)
Wright, Anthony David (Great Yarmouth)
Wright, Anthony Wayland (Cannock Chase)
Wright, David (Telford)
Wyatt, Derek Murray (Sittingbourne and Sheppey)

Y

Yeo, Timothy Stephen Kenneth (South Suffolk)
Young, Rt. Hon. Sir George Samuel Knatchbull (North West Hampshire)
Younger-Ross, Richard (Teignbridge)

HER MAJESTY'S GOVERNMENT

MEMBERS OF THE CABINET

(FORMED BY THE RT. HON. TONY BLAIR, MP, JUNE 2001)

PRIME MINISTER, FIRST LORD OF THE TREASURY AND MINISTER FOR THE CIVIL SERVICE—The Rt. Hon. Tony Blair, MP
DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER AND FIRST SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt. Hon. John Prescott, MP
CHANCELLOR OF THE EXCHEQUER—The Rt. Hon. Gordon Brown, MP
PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL AND LEADER OF THE HOUSE OF COMMONS—The Rt. Hon. Robin Cook, MP
LORD CHANCELLOR—The Rt. Hon. The Lord Irvine of Lairg
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS—The Rt. Hon. Jack Straw, MP
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR THE HOME DEPARTMENT—The Rt. Hon. David Blunkett, MP
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS—The Rt. Hon. Margaret Beckett, MP
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT—The Rt. Hon. Clare Short, MP
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR TRANSPORT—The Rt. Hon. Alistair Darling, MP
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR HEALTH—The Rt. Hon. Alan Milburn, MP
MINISTER WITHOUT PORTFOLIO—The Rt. Hon. Dr. John Reid, MP
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND—The Rt. Hon. Paul Murphy, MP
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR DEFENCE—The Rt. Hon. Geoffrey Hoon, MP
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR WORK AND PENSIONS—The Rt. Hon. Andrew Smith, MP
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR SCOTLAND—The Rt. Hon. Helen Liddell, MP
LORD PRIVY SEAL AND LEADER OF THE HOUSE OF LORDS—The Rt. Hon. The Lord Williams of Mostyn, QC
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR TRADE AND INDUSTRY—The Rt. Hon. Ms Patricia Hewitt, MP
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT—The Rt. Hon. Tessa Jowell, MP
PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY TO THE TREASURY—The Rt. Hon. Hilary Armstrong, MP
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR EDUCATION AND SKILLS—The Rt. Hon. Charles Clarke, MP
CHIEF SECRETARY TO THE TREASURY—The Rt. Hon. Paul Boateng, Esq, MP
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR WALES—The Rt. Hon. Peter Hain, MP

DEPARTMENTS OF STATE AND MINISTERS

Office of the Deputy Prime Minister—
DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER AND FIRST SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt. Hon. John Prescott, MP
MINISTERS OF STATE—
The Rt. Hon. Nick Raynsford, MP (Minister for Local Government and the Regions)
The Rt. Hon. Lord Rooker, MP (Minister for Housing and Planning)
Mrs. Barbara Roche (Minister for Social Exclusion and Deputy Minister for Women)
PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—
Tony McNulty, Esq, MP
Christopher Leslie, Esq, MP

Cabinet Office—
MINISTER FOR THE CABINET OFFICE AND CHANCELLOR OF THE DUCHY OF LANCASTER—The Rt. Hon. The Lord Macdonald of Tradeston
MINISTER OF STATE—
Douglas Alexander, Esq, MP

Culture, Media and Sport—
SECRETARY OF STATE FOR CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT—The Rt. Hon. Tessa Jowell, MP
MINISTERS OF STATE—
The Rt. Hon. Richard Caborn, MP (Minister for Sport)
The Rt. Hon. The Baroness Blackstone (Minister for the Arts)
PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARY OF STATE—
Dr. Kim Howells, MP (Minister for Tourism, Film and Broadcasting)

Defence—
SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt. Hon. Geoffrey Hoon, MP
MINISTER OF STATE—
The Rt. Hon. Adam Ingram, MP
PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—
The Lord Bach
Dr. Lewis Moonie, MP

Education and Skills—
SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt. Hon. Charles Clarke, MP
MINISTERS OF STATE—
Minister for School Standards—David Miliband, Esq, MP
Minister for Lifelong Learning and Higher Education—Margaret Hodge, MP
PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—
The Baroness Ashton of Upholland
Ivan Lewis, Esq, MP
Stephen Twigg, Esq, MP

Environment, Food and Rural Affairs—
SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt. Hon. Margaret Beckett, MP
MINISTERS OF STATE—
Minister for the Environment—The Rt. Hon. Michael Meacher, MP
Minister for Rural Affairs—The Rt. Hon. Alun Michael, MP
PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—
Elliot Morley, Esq, MP
The Lord Whitty

Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs—
SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt. Hon. Jack Straw, MP
MINISTERS OF STATE—
Minister for Trade and Investment—The Rt. Hon. The Baroness Symons of Vernham Dean
Minister for Europe—Denis MacShane, Esq, MP
PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—
Mike O'Brien, Esq, MP
The Baroness Amos
Bill Rammell, Esq, MP

Health—
SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt. Hon. Alan Milburn, MP
MINISTERS OF STATE—
The Rt. Hon. John Hutton, MP
Jacqui Smith, MP
PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—
The Lord Hunt of Kings Heath
Ms Hazel Blears, MP
David Lammy, Esq, MP

Home Office—
SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt. Hon. David Blunkett, MP
MINISTERS OF STATE—
Minister for Policing, Crime Reduction and Community Safety—The Rt. Hon. John Denham, MP
Minister for Criminal Justice, Sentencing and Law Reform—The Lord Falconer of Thoroton, QC
Minister for Citizenship and Immigration—Ms Beverley Hughes, MP
PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—
Hilary Benn, Esq, MP
Bob Ainsworth, Esq, MP
The Lord Filkin, OBE
Michael Wills, Esq, MP

International Development—
SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt. Hon. Clare Short, MP
PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARY OF STATE—Ms Sally Keeble, MP

Law Officers' Department—
ATTORNEY-GENERAL—The Rt. Hon. Lord Goldsmith, QC
SOLICITOR-GENERAL—The Rt. Hon. Harriet Harman, QC, MP
ADVOCATE-GENERAL FOR SCOTLAND—Dr. Lynda Clark, QC, MP

Lord Chancellor's Department—
LORD CHANCELLOR—The Rt. Hon. The Lord Irvine of Lairg, QC
PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARIES—
The Baroness Scotland of Asthal, QC
Ms Yvette Cooper, MP
Ms Rosie Winterton, MP

Northern Ireland Office—
SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt. Hon. Paul Murphy, Esq, MP
MINISTER OF STATE—Jane Kennedy, MP
PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—
Desmond Browne, Esq, MP
Ian Pearson, Esq, MP
Angela Smith, MP

Paymaster General's Office—
PAYMASTER GENERAL—The Rt. Hon. Dawn Primarolo, MP

Privy Council Office—
PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL AND LEADER OF THE HOUSE OF COMMONS—The Rt. Hon. Robin Cook, MP
PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY—Ben Bradshaw, Esq, MP

Scotland Office—
SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt. Hon. Helen Liddell, MP
PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARY OF STATE—
Mrs. Anne McGuire

Trade and Industry—
SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt. Hon. Ms Patricia Hewitt, MP
MINISTERS OF STATE—
Minister for E-Commerce and Competitiveness—Stephen Timms, Esq, MP
Minister for Trade and Investment—The Rt. Hon. The Baroness Symons of Vernham Dean
Minister for Energy and Construction—Brian Wilson, Esq, MP
Minister for Employment Relations, Industry and the Regions—Alan Johnson, Esq, MP
PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—
The Lord Sainsbury of Turville
Miss Melanie Johnson, MP
Nigel Griffiths, Esq, MP

Transport—
SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt. Hon. Alistair Darling, MP
MINISTER OF STATE—
Minister for Transport—The Rt. Hon. John Spellar, MP
PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARY OF STATE—
David Jamieson, Esq, MP

Treasury—
PRIME MINISTER, FIRST LORD OF THE TREASURY AND MINISTER FOR THE CIVIL SERVICE—The Rt. Hon. Tony Blair, MP
CHANCELLOR OF THE EXCHEQUER—The Rt. Hon. Gordon Brown, MP
CHIEF SECRETARY—The Rt. Hon. Paul Boateng, MP
PAYMASTER GENERAL—Dawn Primarolo, MP
FINANCIAL SECRETARY—Ms Ruth Kelly, MP
ECONOMIC SECRETARY—John Healey, Esq, MP
PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY—The Rt. Hon. Hilary Armstrong, MP
LORDS COMMISSIONERS—
John Heppell, Esq, MP
Nick Ainger, Esq, MP
Jim Fitzpatrick, Esq, MP
Phil Woolas, Esq, MP
ASSISTANT WHIPS—
Fraser Kemp, Esq, MP
Ivor Caplin, Esq, MP
Dan Norris, MP
Jim Murphy, Esq, MP
Derek Twigg, Esq, MP
Joan Ryan, MP
Charlotte Atkins, MP
Gillian Merron, MP

Wales Office—
SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt. Hon. Peter Hain, MP
PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARY OF STATE—Don Touhig, Esq, MP

Work and Pensions—

SECRETARY OF STATE—The Rt. Hon. Andrew Smith, MP

MINISTERS OF STATE—

Minister for Work—The Rt. Hon. Nicholas Brown, MP

Minister for Pensions—The Rt. Hon. Ian McCartney, MP

PARLIAMENTARY UNDER-SECRETARIES OF STATE—

The Rt. Hon. The Baroness Hollis of Heigham

Malcolm Wicks, Esq, MP

Maria Eagle, MP

Her Majesty's Household—

LORD CHAMBERLAIN—The Rt. Hon. The Lord Luce, GCVO

LORD STEWARD—The Viscount Ridley, KG, GCVO, TD

MASTER OF THE HORSE—The Lord Vestey

TREASURER—Keith Hill, Esq, MP

COMPTROLLER—Thomas McAvoy, Esq, MP

VICE-CHAMBERLAIN—Gerry Sutcliffe, Esq, MP

CAPTAIN OF THE HONOURABLE CORPS OF GENTLEMEN-AT-ARMS—The Rt. Hon. The Lord Grocott

CAPTAIN OF THE QUEEN'S BODYGUARD OF THE YEOMAN OF THE GUARD—The Lord McIntosh of Haringey

LORDS IN WAITING—The Lord Davies of Oldham, The Lord Bassam of Brighton

BARONESSES IN WAITING—The Baroness Farrington of Ribbleton, The Baroness Andrews, OBE, The Baroness Crawley

---

SECOND CHURCH ESTATES COMMISSIONER, REPRESENTING CHURCH COMMISSIONERS—Stuart Bell, Esq, MP

HOUSE OF COMMONS

OFFICERS AND STAFF

THE SPEAKER—The Rt. Hon. Michael J. Martin, MP
CHAIRMAN OF WAYS AND MEANS—The Rt. Hon. Sir Alan Haselhurst, MP
FIRST DEPUTY CHAIRMAN OF WAYS AND MEANS—Mrs. Sylvia Heal, MP
SECOND DEPUTY CHAIRMAN OF WAYS AND MEANS—Sir Michael Lord, MP
CHAIRMEN'S PANEL—
HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION—The Rt. Hon. The Speaker (Chairman), The Rt. Hon. Robin Cook, MP, The Rt. Hon. Eric Forth, MP, Archy Kirkwood, Esq, MP, Stuart Bell, Esq, MP, Sir Patrick Cormack, FSA, MP
SECRETARY OF THE COMMISSION—R. J. Rogers
AUDIT COMMITTEE—The Rt. Hon Eric Forth, MP (Chairman), Archy Kirkwood, Esq, MP, Sir Thomas S. Legg, KCB, QC, David Taylor, FCA
SECRETARY OF THE AUDIT COMMITTEE—Mrs. S. A. R. Davies
BOARD OF MANAGEMENT—
Sir William McKay, KCB (Chief Executive), G. Cubie (Clerk of Committees, Department of the Clerk of the House), M. J. A. Cummins (Serjeant at Arms), Miss P. J. Baines (Librarian), A. J. Walker (Director of Finance and Administration), W. G. Garland (Editor of the Official Report), Mrs. S. J. Harrison (Director of Catering Services)
SECRETARY OF THE BOARD OF MANAGEMENT—R. J. Ware, DPhil

OFFICE OF THE SPEAKER

SPEAKER'S SECRETARY—Sir Nicolas Bevan, CB
ASSISTANT SECRETARY TO THE SPEAKER—P. F. Barratt
TRAINBEARER—I. Davis
DIARY SECRETARY—Mrs. Jane Shaw
OFFICE MANAGER—
SPEAKER'S COUNSEL—J. E. G. Vaux
SPEAKER'S CHAPLAIN—Rev. Canon A. R. Wright
MEDICAL ADVISER TO THE SPEAKER—Dr. R. Zeegen, OBE, FRCP, MRCS, DObst, RCOG

PARLIAMENTARY COMMISSIONER FOR STANDARDS

PARLIAMENTARY COMMISSIONER FOR STANDARDS—Sir Philip Mawer

OFFICE OF THE CHAIRMAN OF WAYS AND MEANS

SECRETARY TO THE CHAIRMAN OF WAYS AND MEANS—M. Hennessy

OFFICE OF THE CLERK

HEAD OF OFFICE—R. J. Ware, DPhil
PRIVATE SECRETARY TO THE CLERK OF THE HOUSE—Mrs. S. A. R. Davies
COMMUNICATIONS ADVISER—Ms L. Parratt
FREEDOM OF INFORMATION OFFICER—Ms J. Wilson
INTERNAL COMMUNICATIONS OFFICER—Ms M. Cwynarski
COMMUNICATIONS OFFICER—Ms T. Herd
OFFICE MANAGER—A. Jenner

DEPARTMENT OF THE CLERK OF THE HOUSE

CLERK OF THE HOUSE OF COMMONS—Sir William McKay, KCB
CLERK ASSISTANT—R. B. Sands
CLERK OF COMMITTEES—G. Cubie
CLERK OF LEGISLATION—D. G. Millar
PRINCIPAL CLERKS—
M.R. Jack, PhD (Journal Office)
Ms H. E. Irwin (Table Office)
R. W. G. Wilson (Select Committees)
W. A. Proctor (Delegated Legislation)
Mrs. J. Sharpe (Overseas Office)
F. A. Cranmer (Bills)

R. J. Rogers (Domestic Committees)
D. L. Natzler (Select Committees)
D.W.N. Doig (Select Committees)

DEPUTY PRINCIPAL CLERKS—Ms A. Barry, C. R. M. Ward, PhD, A. Sandall, A. R. Kennon, L. C. Laurence Smyth, S. J. Patrick, D. J. Gerhold, C. J. Poyser, D. F. Harrison, S. J. Priestley, A. H. Doherty, P. A. Evans, R. I. S. Phillips, R. G. James, PhD, D. R. Lloyd, B. M. Hutton, J. S. Benger, DPhil, Ms E.C. Samson, N. P. Walker, Mrs. E. J. Flood, C. G. Lee, C. D. Stanton, Ms L. M. Gardner, F. J. Reid, C. A. Shaw, P. G. Moon, T. W. P. Healey, P. J. Aylett (acting)

SENIOR CLERKS—M. Hennessy, G. R. Devine, M. Clark, Mrs. J. N. St. J. Mulley, J. D. Whatley, K. C. Fox, J. D. W. Rhys, Mrs E. S. Hunt, Ms S. McGlashan, Mrs. C. Oxborough, T. Goldsmith, H. A. Yardley, Ms K. M. Emms, N. P. Wright, M. P. Hillyard, M. P. Atkins, M. Egan, J. H. Davies, Miss S. J. Fox, S. Mark, Ms J. S. Eldred (acting), S. T. Fiander (acting), D. H. Griffiths (acting), Ms R. Melling, CBE (acting), A. M. Kidner (acting), D. Lees (acting), T. Byrne (acting).

ASSISTANT CLERKS—Ms C. A. Littleboy, R. C. A. Cooke, G. F. J. Farrar, Miss T. S. Garratty, Miss S. F. Ioannou, G. K. Clarke, Miss N. Welfoot, Miss S. Hartwell, Ms. S. Jones, Miss O. Davidson, Miss J. McCullough, Miss E. Preston.

AUDITORS, SCRUTINY UNIT—Ms. R. Farmer, V. McCarthy

ESTIMATES SPECIALIST, SCRUTINY UNIT—G. McKee

INWARD VISITS MANAGER—Ms R. J. Challis

SENIOR EXECUTIVE OFFICERS—Miss J. Appleton, Miss E. C. G. Partridge, I. R. Thomson

PERSONNEL AND ESTABLISHMENTS OFFICER—Mrs. S. D. Pamphlett

COMMITTEE SPECIALISTS—T. J. B. Jarrett, E. Lewis, R. Kelly, Ms E. Downing, C. Carrington, Miss E. Sellwood, Ms. A. Baker, Ms. C. O'Shaughnessy, Dr. G. Marsden, Dr. A. Roberts, Dr. A. Hudson, Ms S. Eustace, Ms. L. Hilder, Dr. J. Gearson, B. Kochan, Dr. K. Trumper, Dr. P. Larkin, Ms. R. Pillay, Ms. M. Hill

HIGHER EXECUTIVE OFFICERS—L. L. Kaye, MBE, A. P. Hubner, Mrs. P. Fisher, F. McShane, Miss F. L. Allingham, Mrs. L. M. Nugent, M. P. Oxborough, Ms C. M. Genis, A. Catinella, Ms A. Fuki, Mrs. D. B. Nelson, P. A. Derrett, Miss K. McClelland, R. Dawson, Miss J. Recardo, Miss A. O'Rourke, K. Candy, Mrs F. Channon, Miss K. Phelan, Mrs L. Wrobel, D. Langton, I. Hook.

DEPARTMENTAL TRAINING AND SUPPORT OFFICER—Ms S. P. Chubb

DEPARTMENTAL COMMUNICATIONS OFFICER—Miss C. Every

DEPARTMENTAL FINANCIAL SUPPORT OFFICER—Mrs S. Marshall

EDITORIAL SUPERVISOR OF THE VOTE—Miss L. Lewis

DEPUTY EDITORIAL SUPERVISOR OF THE VOTE—J. Puricelli

ASSISTANT EDITORIAL SUPERVISORS OF THE VOTE—K. B. Wood, P. D. Howlett, Mrs. L. R. Shade, P. A. Jack, P. Sullivan, D. Mahoney, Mrs. B. Ward, Ms. B. Woods, Ms. D. Tonge

SECRETARIES—Mrs. G. E. C. Sclater, MBE (Clerk of the House), Mrs. D. Gent, Miss A. T. Power, Mrs. K. J. Georgiou, Miss L. Young, Mrs. H. Agnew, Mrs. B. M. Hunter, Ms A. M. Allen, Mrs. K. Watling, Miss M. Owens, Mrs. S. Bertasius, Mrs. A. Williams, Miss S. D. Wakeling, Miss S. Monaghan, Mrs A Game, Miss C. Close, Mrs. A. J. Waller, Miss E. Booth, Miss J. Storey, Miss J. A. Crowder, Miss L. Hasall, Ms. L. Pelletier, Mrs. M. J. Barklem, Mrs. K. Bishop, Mrs. J. Kalogerides, Mrs. J. M. Cooper, Miss R. M. Jefferson, Miss S. V. Ramsay, Mrs. P. R. Morris, Mrs. S. Morrison, Miss L. Young, Miss A. C. Woolhouse, Miss J. Lauder, Miss F. Mearns, Mrs. A. Browning, Mrs. Y. Platt, Miss J. Kelly, Ms S. V. Panchanathan, Miss R. M. Macdonald, Ms S. Leslie, Mrs. R. Crew, Ms. J. Nelson, Miss C. Jackson, Miss E. McCracken, Miss K. McConnell, Ms. D. Summers, Ms. S. Colebrook, Ms. E. Carey, Miss C. McElwee

EXAMINERS OF PETITIONS FOR PRIVATE BILLS—F. A. Cranmer, T. V. Mohan

TAXING OFFICER—F. A. Cranmer

DEPARTMENTAL OFFICE MANAGER—S. A. Haher

DEPUTY OFFICE MANAGER (ACCOMMODATION)—R. A. Broomfield

ASSISTANT OFFICE MANAGER—Miss G. Foster

CHIEF OFFICE CLERKS—J. A. Hole, I. Blair, B. Dye, Miss P. Wainwright, R. J. Bartram, D. J. Hackett, Mrs C. M. Bowes, Ms. J. Hunter, Miss E. Sawyer, R. Poureshagh, Mrs M. Lewis

SENIOR OFFICE CLERKS—S. M. Cruickshank, Miss R. C. Mead, Miss A. Ferreira, Mrs. D. Brown, Mrs. S. Colebrook, Mrs. S. Niven, P. J. Lyon, A. Mahoney, A. Mitchell, J. Kittle, A. Chudasama, J. Lawford, A. Boyd, K. Gardner, M. Kubala

OFFICE SUPPORT ASSISTANTS—R. C. Sharp, G. Payne, K. Pryke, R. Lloyd, B. Greene, J. Nugent, T. Stranger, G. Fleck, C. Smith

Legal Services Office

SPEAKER'S COUNSEL AND HEAD OF LEGAL SERVICES OFFICE—J. E. G. Vaux

COUNSEL FOR LEGISLATION—A. Preston

COUNSEL FOR EUROPEAN LEGISLATION—M. Carpenter

ASSISTANT COUNSEL—A. Akbar, P. Brooksbank

ASSISTANT LEGAL ADVISER/POLICY ANALYST—Miss F.C. McLean

ASSISTANT LEGAL ADVISER (EUROPEAN)—Dr. G. Beck

GENERAL LEGAL ASSISTANT—Ms V. Daly

Vote Office—

DELIVERER OF THE VOTE—J. F. Collins

DEPUTY DELIVERERS OF THE VOTE—F. W. Hallett (Production), O. B. T. Sweeney (Parliamentary), R. Brook (Development)

ASSISTANT DELIVERERS—B. G. Underwood (Parliamentary), Ms J. Pitt (Production), Ms K. M. Barker (Administration)
IS/IT MANAGER—G. C. Peek
BOOKSHOP MANAGER—Mrs. S. Mitchell
WEBMASTER—R. King
IT SUPPORT MANAGER—T. Dancey
IT FIELD ENGINEER—Miss H. G. van Schijndel
PRINT MANAGERS—C. P. Williams, T. J. Green
SUPERINTENDING CLERKS—Mrs. S. Fuzio, A. J. Ashton
CHIEF OFFICE CLERKS—G. E. Howard, P. Hannett, J. Harrington, M. D. Cook, Mrs. V. Makhecha, P. Smith, Miss B. Wilson, J. Carroll, N. G. Battley
SENIOR OFFICE CLERKS—I. H. Bright, R. Cao, Miss J. Flint, M. D. Loveday, Mrs. F. Ahmed, N. Lawrence, P. Moran, D. Martin, N. Monk, M. Reddy, P. Murphy, J. Reddin, P. Fisher (temp)
BOOKSHOP SALES ADVISERS—Miss C. Leach, Ms E. Bradshaw, Ms. E. Jude, Ms. M. Mawji
PORTERS—S. Connor, P. Best, D. O'Connell

Parliamentary Broadcasting—
DIRECTOR—Ms B. E. Long
TECHNICIANS (PARLIAMENTARY RECORDING UNIT)—D. Loader, Miss C. Bebbington

Parliamentary Office of Science and Technology—
DIRECTOR—Prof. D. Cope
SCIENTIFIC FELLOWS—Dr. P. Border, G. Kass, Dr. S. Pearce, Dr. J. Russell, Dr. P. Nath, Dr H. Dickinson (temp)
SECRETARIES—Miss J. Farrell, Ms L. Tebble

DEPARTMENT OF THE SERJEANT AT ARMS

SERJEANT AT ARMS—M. J. A. Cummins
FINANCE MANAGER—P. Collins
EXECUTIVE OFFICER—Mrs. J. Pay
PERSONAL ASSISTANT—Miss R. Linnell

Serjeant's Operations Directorate—
DEPUTY SERJEANT AT ARMS—R. M. Morton
PERSONAL ASSISTANT AND OFFICE MANAGER—Miss M. Healey
ASSISTANT SERJEANTS AT ARMS—P. A. J. Wright, J. M. Robertson, M. C. D. Harvey
CLERK IN CHARGE AND ACCOMMODATION CO-ORDINATOR—Miss S. J. Scott Thomson
ADMISSION ORDER OFFICE—Mrs. S. J. Warren
PRINCIPAL DOORKEEPER—G. Dear
HEAD OFFICE KEEPER—B. Mulvihill
PASS OFFICE MANAGER—M. Coombs

Parliamentary Estates Directorate—
DIRECTOR OF ESTATES—H. Webber, CEng, FICE
PROJECT SPONSOR—A. Makepeace
FIRE SAFETY MANAGER—R. Bentley, MIFireE
HEAD OF SECRETARIAT—M. Trott

Parliamentary Works Services Directorate—
DIRECTOR OF PARLIAMENTARY WORKS SERVICES—L. Brantingham, CEng, MICE, FCIArb
MANAGER, BUILDING PROJECT BRANCH—J. Prew, BSc, CEng
PRINCIPAL ENGINEER—C. Hillier, JP, CEng, FIMechE, MIEE
WORKS MANAGER—L. Benjamin, BEng(Hons), CEng, MCIBS
FURNISHING MANAGER—G. Goode

Parliamentary Communications Directorate
DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS—M. Taylor
PROGRAMME MANAGER—Dr. G. Williams
INFORMATION SYSTEMS MANAGER—Mrs. J. Walker

General Services
SHORTHAND WRITER TO THE HOUSE—Mrs. P. J. Woolgar
HEAD OF SECURITY—Chief Superintendent G. Roylance
POSTMASTER—M. Pearce

DEPARTMENT OF THE LIBRARY

LIBRARIAN—Priscilla Baines
DIRECTORS—Keith Cuninghame (Resources), Rob Clements (Research Services), Betty McInnes (Information Systems), Bob Twigger (Parliamentary and Reference Services)
HEADS OF SECTION—Chris Pond, Carole Andrews, Julia Lourie, Christopher Barclay, Christine Gillie, Richard Cracknell, Edward Wood, Patsy Richards
SENIOR CLERKS—Fiona Poole, Tim Edmonds, Donna Gore, Helen Holden, Philippa Carling, Steve Wise, Pat Strickland, Vaughne Miller, Jo Roll, Wendy Wilson, Paul Bowers, Antony Seeley, Jane Hough, Grahame Danby, Bryn Morgan, Katharine Wright, Lorraine Conway, Christopher Blair, Chris Sear, Felicity Whittle, Keith Parry, Alex Sleator, Brenda Brevitt, Dora Clark, Tim Youngs, Stephen McGinness, Paul Bolton, Sally Broadbridge, Steven Kennedy, Ruth Winstone (acting)

ASSISTANT CLERKS—Arabella Thorp, Grahame Allen, Gavin Berman, Elena Ares, Dominic Webb, Adam Mellows-Facer, David Knott, Ross Young, Ian Townsend, Sarah Meagher (period), Claire Taylor, Catherine Fairbairn, Susan Hubble

SENIOR LIBRARY EXECUTIVES—Isobel White, Christine Fretten, John Prince, Gill Cooper, Julia Keddie, Gini Griffin

SENIOR EXECUTIVE OFFICERS—Catrin Owens, Paul Ryan, Dave Brown, Janice Davies, Paul Mann

EDUCATION OFFICER—Chris Weeds

DEPUTY EDUCATION OFFICER—Nicola Harland

EDUCATION OFFICER (PORTCULLIS HOUSE)—Celia O' Connor (acting)

ASSISTANT EDUCATION OFFICER (PORTCULLIS HOUSE)—Tony Williams (acting)

HIGHER LIBRARY EXECUTIVES—Hazel Armstrong, Timothy Holmes, Richard Freebury, Fiona Ward, Janet Hall, Gill Brown, Andrew Parker, Jeremy Brevitt, Julie Priestley, Corie Chambers, Katharine Fitch, Gavin Newell, Emma Vaughan, Ben Smith, Clare Piper, Philip Ward, Fiona Green, Lorna McGuire, Angela Rushbrook, Gemma Wallace

HIGHER EXECUTIVE OFFICERS—Ed MacGregor, Brigitte Onyskiw, Sam Hayward, Gabrielle Hughes, Antoinette Balaban, Jacqueline Ahrens (acting), Alison Penman

LIBRARY EXECUTIVES—Jennifer Smith, Fintan Codd, John Woodhouse, Penny Turley, Neil Johnston, Claire Williams, Catharine Davies, Susan Brown, Jane Wilson, Martin Michell, Emma Bainbridge, Jayshree Patel, Sarah Boyd-Moss, John Evans, Jason Rowe, Edward Murphy, Julie Gill, Susan Murphy

EXECUTIVE OFFICERS—Alison Mara, Sue Holland, Mike Greenhill, Jean Fessey, Catherine Blair, Andrew Clark, Sarah Pepin, Mo Moulton, Prue Burnett, Nikki Sutherland, Sarah Priddy, Gloria Tyler, Nigel Jolly, Alex Adcock, Catherine Bruce, Stewart Howe, Christine Randall, Claire Jenkins, Andrew Lindsay, Mark Eagleton, Raj Maman, David Tewsley, Jennie Page, Stephen Wilde, Lynne Wheatley, Gregory Howard, Tom Powell, Richard Woodward, Gary Calder, Nigel Walker, Susannah Ferguson, Edmund Tetteh

SENIOR OFFICE CLERKS—Tegwen Thomas, Peter Alford, Steve Hammett, Lal Clay, Stuart Paston, Mike Stewart, Elizabeth O'Halloran, Joseph Garber, Jacqueline Baker, Sarah Price, Timothy Robinson, Chris Richardson, David O'Nions, Louise Jutsum, Helen Nielsen, Andrew Dommett, Jimmy Rand, Tina Shingler, Matthew Jones, Simon Coates, Alex Kemp, Louise Combs, Rachel Wilson, Anna Wiseman, Jacqueline Etheridge, Jude Crocker, Matthew Ringer, Debbie Cesvette, Leila Bridges, Kirsty Morgan, Mary Durkin, Caroline Luff, Jenny Dolan, Matthew Instone, Jessica Williamson, Elizabeth Bradshaw, Roderick McInnes, Edward Beale (temp), James Carron, Elizabeth Carless, Laurent Palacio (temp)

PERSONAL SECRETARIES GRADE 2—Sue Holt, Joan Page, Jen Laney, Lynda Mirams, Kay Redknap

PERSONAL SECRETARIES GRADE 3—Debbie Sullivan, Mary Walsh, Linda Reed, Linda Baxter, Jennifer Gouge, Elizabeth Hasell, Sheila Jennings, Hazel Mummery, Josephine Cook

SENIOR LIBRARY ASSISTANTS—John O'Hagan, David Usher, Stephen Haver, David Wright, Jon Brunger

LIBRARY ASSISTANTS—Bill Bucksey, Tony Wheeler, John Coster, Kevin Murray, Robin Ashburn, Ray Etherington

HEAD LIBRARY CLEANER—Christine Daley

DEPARTMENT OF FINANCE AND ADMINISTRATION

Director's Office

DIRECTOR OF FINANCE AND ADMINISTRATION—Andrew Walker

ASSISTANT TO DIRECTOR OF FINANCE AND ADMINISTRATION—Mike Page

DEPARTMENTAL FINANCE OFFICER AND ASSISTANT TO DIRECTOR OF FINANCE AND ADMINISTRATION—Kym Bigwood

HIGHER EXECUTIVE OFFICER—Elizabeth Seabrook

PERSONAL ASSISTANT TO DIRECTOR OF FINANCE AND ADMINISTRATION/DIRECTOR OF OPERATIONS—Yvonne Carson

CUSTOMER RELATIONS ADMINISTRATOR—Suzanne Stevens

Business Development Directorate

DIRECTOR OF BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT AND DEPARTMENT ESTABLISHMENTS OFFICER (DEO) - Elizabeth Honer

Business Development Project Office

PROJECT DIRECTOR—Gill Crowther

PROJECT DIRECTOR—Colin Cornish

PROJECT MANAGER—Debbie McGuire

PROJECT MANAGER—Jane Cleveland

PROJECT MANAGER—Clare Jackson

PROJECT MANAGER—Neil Crawley

Corporate Services

Central procurement Office

DIRECTOR OF PROCUREMENT—Kevin Treeby

DEPUTY DIRECTOR OF PROCUREMENT—Sue Cunningham

PROCUREMENT OPERATIONS MANAGER—Priya Rao

PROCUREMENT OPERATIONS ASSISTANT—Angela Gladwin

House-wide Training and Development and Diversity

HOUSE-WIDE TRAINING AND DIVERSITY—Estelle Burns

PROJECT MANAGER—Richard Edwards

SENIOR OFFICE CLERK—Karen Baptiste

Departmental Services

Training and Development Team

DEPARTMENTAL TRAINING MANAGER/DEPUTY DBO—Jane O'Mahoney
TRAINING AND COMMUNICATIONS CO-ORDINATOR—Julia Fogden
TRAINING AND COMMUNICATIONS CO-ORDINATOR—Cathy Slade
TRAINING AND HR CO-ORDINATOR—Matthew Bentley
PLACEMENT STUDENT—Krishna Sidhpura

Records Management

RECORDS MANAGEMENT OFFICER—Irene Brydon
DEPARTMENTAL REGISTRAR—Betty Maynard

Resources Unit

RESOURCES MANAGER—Paul Olden
RESOURCES OFFICER—Brian Palmer
RESOURCES ASSISTANT—David Hankard
RESOURCES ASSISTANT—Nick Kenyon
RESOURCES ASSISTANT—Ravi Abhayaratne
BOOKSTALL SALESPERSON—Freda Bates

Fees Office/Operations Directorate

DIRECTOR OF OPERATIONS—Archie Cameron
DEPUTY DIRECTOR OF OPERATIONS—Heather Wood
PROJECT CO-ORDINATOR—Trudy Myers
PROJECT CO-ORDINATOR—Siobhan Chalmers
ASSISTANT DIRECTOR OF OPERATIONS—Norma Norman
OPERATIONS SUPPORT MANAGER—Georgie Jessiman
OPERATIONS DEVELOPMENT MANAGER—Guy Turner

Personnel Team

PERSONNEL OFFICE MANAGER—Jane Grieveson
PERSONNEL OFFICE MANAGER—Sarah Wilkinson
PERSONNEL ADVICE SERVICE MANAGER—Tara West
PERSONNEL OFFICER—Lucy Hallam
PERSONNEL OFFICER—Sandra Deakins
ASSISTANT PERSONNEL OFFICER—Elaine Sloan
PERSONNEL ASSISTANT—Anna Bowman
PERSONNEL OFFICER—Maxine Albert
PERSONNEL OFFICER—Denise Eltringham
ASSISTANT PERSONNEL OFFICER—Sarah Maynard
PERSONNEL ASSISTANT—Sarah-Jane Robbie
ASSISTANT PERSONNEL OFFICER—Joanne Jackson

Pensions unit

PENSIONS UNIT MANAGER—Lucy Watson
DATABASE MANAGER—Brian McAleer
SENIOR PENSIONS OFFICER—Francene Graham
SENIOR PENSIONS OFFICER—Dermot Woods
PENSIONS OFFICER—Ginette Wallis
PENSIONS OFFICER—Hayley Brockwell
PENSIONS ASSISTANT—Louise Glennon
PENSIONS OFFICER—Paul Martin
COMMUNICATIONS ASSISTANT—Natasha Kaye
CONSULTANT ON THE PARLIAMENTARY CONTRIBUTORY PENSION FUND (MEMBERS)—Jo Whiterod

Staff Payroll team

PAYROLL MANAGER—Lauraine Barrow
SENIOR PAYROLL OFFICER—Sam Kelly
SENIOR PAYROLL OFFICER—Ros Bolt
PAYROLL OFFICER—Patricia Welch
PAYROLL OFFICER—Nik Majer
PAYROLL OFFICER—Jim Hudson
PAYROLL OFFICER—Perry French

Budget Monitoring Team

PAYMENTS MANAGER—Dan Gorman
EXECUTIVE OFFICER—Andy Gibson
PAYMENTS OFFICER—Yasmin McNeil

Members and Members' Staff Payroll

PAYROLL MANAGER—Caroline Stockton
SENIOR PAYROLL OFFICER—Bhavna Parekh
SENIOR PAYROLL OFFICER—Nikki Carman
PAYROLL OFFICER—Jordan Neville

PAYROLL OFFICER—Ronnie Bates
PAYROLL OFFICER—Emma Kearney
PAYROLL OFFICER—Kay Patel

Members' Staff Pensions
SENIOR PAYMENTS OFFICER—Julia Nellis
PENSIONS OFFICER—Chris Cruse
PAYROLL OFFICER—Antonia Garraway

Accounts Payable Team
ACCOUNTS MANAGER—Teresa Ruewell
SENIOR ACCOUNTS OFFICER—Vacancy
SENIOR ACCOUNTS OFFICER—Mandy Kelly
ACCOUNTS CLERK—Elizabeth Asiwaju
ACCOUNTS CLERK—Andrew Folami
ACCOUNTS CLERK—Bosede Kumuyi
ACCOUNTS CLERK—Carmen Carvalho
ACCOUNTS CLERK—Sandy Gill

Members' Travel Payments
PAYMENTS MANAGER—Andy Martin
SENIOR PAYMENTS OFFICER—Jo Lush
SENIOR PAYMENTS OFFICER—Nicky Price
PAYMENTS OFFICER—Jim Smyth
PAYMENTS OFFICER—David Phipps
PAYMENTS OFFICER—Elizabeth Mitchell
PAYMENTS OFFICER—Michael De Tisi
PAYMENTS OFFICER—Nana Poku

Members' Allowances Payments
SENIOR PAYMENTS OFFICER—David Yoxall
PAYMENTS OFFICER—Jack Nixon
PAYMENTS OFFICER—James Lyddon
PAYMENTS OFFICER—Emoy Booth
SENIOR PAYMENTS OFFICER—Alan Rowlands
PROCESSING CLERK—Dominic Difolco
PROCESSING CLERK—Myla Kelly
ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT—Claire Lorrenzetto

Personnel Policy Directorate
DIRECTOR OF PERSONNEL POLICY—Susan Craig

Personnel and Pay Policy
HEAD OF HR PLANNING AND PAY POLICY—Reg Perry
HEAD OF PAY POLICY UNIT—Jane Leverton
HEAD OF PERSONNEL POLICY UNIT—Andy Vallins
PAY POLICY ADVISER—Tom White
PERSONNEL POLICY ADVISER—Andrew Wallace
ASSISTANT PAY POLICY ADVISER—Nigel Sequeira
POLICY SUPPORT ADMINISTRATOR—Anne Foster

Trade Union
TRADE UNION SIDE ADMINISTRATOR—Josephine Willows

Occupational Health and Safety Welfare
HEAD OF OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH, SAFETY AND WELFARE SERVICES—Janice Tofts
OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH MANAGER—Dawn Clifford
WELFARE OFFICER—Anne Mossop
HEALTH AND SAFETY ADVISER—John Wettler
PRACTICE NURSE—Susan Huckle
PRACTICE NURSE—Penny Hall
PRACTICE NURSE—Karen St. Cyr
ASSISTANT WELFARE OFFICER—Tanya Harris
OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH ADMINISTRATOR—Michelle Garraty
OFFICE MANAGER—Carol Prestidge
MEDICAL ADVISER—Dr. David Izan
CONSULTANT HEALTH PHYSICIAN—Dr. David Murray-Bruce

Financial Management Directorate
DIRECTOR OF FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT—Mike Barram
FINANCIAL DEVELOPMENT MANAGER—Rachel Harrison

Management Accounts Team
BUSINESS PLANNING MANAGER—Peter Lamb
ASSISTANT ACCOUNTANT—Sarah Doyle
MANAGEMENT ACCOUNTS OFFICER—Pat Dawson
MANAGEMENT ACCOUNTS ASSISTANT—Tim Balogun
MANAGEMENT ACCOUNTS ASSISTANT—Saeka Parkar

Management Accounts and Asset Management Teams
FINANCIAL CONTROLLER—Simon Little
ASSISTANT ACCOUNTANT—Samir Rao
ASSISTANT ACCOUNTANT—David Laryea
ACCOUNTS MANAGER—Elaine Lavery
ASSET REGISTER ASSISTANT—Alan Storie
BUREAU SERVICES OFFICER—Ben Seaden
BUREAU SERVICES CLERK—Ben Arthurs

HAIS (House Administrative Information System) Team
HEAD OF HAIS PROJECT—Peter Skerratt
DEVELOPMENT MANAGER—Viv Browne
HAIS ADMINISTRATOR—Julie Diamond
HAIS BUSINESS ANALYST—Stephanie Peterson

Information Systems services
HEAD OF ISS—Martin Goodman
IS SUPPORT MANAGER—Laura Leeming
IS SUPPORT OFFICER—Gavin Murphy
IS SUPPORT OFFICER—James Yankah-Ashun
IS SUPPORT OFFICER—Rajinder Dusila
ASSISTANT WEBMASTER—Nick Jones
ASSISTANT SUPPORT OFFICER—Michael Smith

Internal Review Services Directorate
DIRECTOR OF INTERNAL REVIEW SERVICES—Richard Russell
REVIEW MANAGER—Bob Castle
PRINCIPAL AUDITOR—Diane Hill
AUDITOR—Rachael Smith
REVIEW ASSISTANT—Hasina Khatun
REVIEW ASSISTANT—Jonathan Esseku

DEPARTMENT OF THE OFFICIAL REPORT

EDITOR—W. G. Garland
DEPUTY EDITOR (PERSONNEL, FINANCE AND ADMINISTRATION)—Catherine Fogarty
DEPUTY EDITOR (HOUSE)—Ms L. Sutherland
DEPUTY EDITOR (COMMITTEES)—Vivian Widgery
PRINCIPAL ASSISTANT EDITORS— Kate Stewart, P. Hadlow, M.D.C.Watson, Miss C. Hanly, Annie Browne, D. A. Jones, A. Newton
ASSISTANT EDITOR—V. Grainger
COMMITTEE SUB-EDITORS—D. Crosswell, Mrs. H. J. G. Natzler, Mrs. A. Street, Mrs. E. J. Gregory, Miss K. Myers, Ms J. Warrington, Mrs. J. Symons, Jill Davies, Joanna Goodman, Miss J. Levy, Ms V. P. Wilson, Ms M. Wright, J. Prawer, Ms V. Hart, D. Weir, K. Gall, F. A. Minichiello
REPORTERS—Miss E. Morris, Miss P. Hill, Ms S. M. Weinberg, P. Kirby, Miss E. Brazier, R. Wildman, Ms E. Harrison, R. Gunby, Ms L. Linchis, Ms B. E. Jones, D. W. Hampton, Ms P. Dadley, Ms. A. Dodd, J. Homer, Ms J. Wheway, B. Geall, J. Hoare
SENIOR COMMITTEE REPORTERS—Miss J. Beck, Miss F. Stevenson, Miss P. P. A. Simpson, M. Newman
COMMITTEE REPORTERS—Ms. L. H. Sinclair, P. K. Underhill, Katie Trickey, Ms K. Moss, R. Hallas, Ms F. J. Reardon, G. S. J. Wigmore, J. F. O'Donoghue, Miss E. Beattie, N. Beech, Sue Delaney, Jez Oates, Sharon Wilkinson, Judi Sheffrin, Alison Fincken, Angus Andrews, Robert I. Littlejohn, Helen M. Curl, Ms Joanna Lipkowska, A. Mackenzie, Clare Treanor, J. Dodd, J. Sturt, S. Minaee, N. Palmer
TRAINEE COMMITTEE REPORTERS—
TRAINING MANAGER—D. A. Jones
HEALTH AND SAFETY MANAGER—Mrs. M. Garland
HEAD OF ADMINISTRATION—S. O'Riordan
SENIOR HANSARD ADMINISTRATORS—J. Brake, B. Harrison
HANSARD ADMINISTRATORS—B. J. Hudson, Miss C. Hudson, M. Woolfenden, Miss S. Seal
SENIOR HANSARD ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANTS—Miss J. Hoare, Mrs. M. Ferreira
HANSARD ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT—P. Younger
HEAD OF IT—R. A. Hill
IT MANAGERS—R. Daniels, C. Bumstead, A. Vyas, M. Rodrigues, D. Raymond
SENIOR PROGRAMMING ANALYST—P. Oakley
JUNIOR PROGRAMMING ANALYST—S. Armstrong
WORD PROCESSING ASSISTANTS—Ms W. Agnew, Ms D. Cairns
WRITTEN ANSWERS MANAGER—Brian Cook
DEPUTIES—P. A. McGandy, Miss D. J. Royle
WRITTEN ANSWERS OPERATORS—Ms S. Alexander, Ms R. Hanif, Mrs. G. A. Leslie, Mrs. M. T. Valente, Ms S. Dryden, Miss L. Rostron, Miss Sallie Diamond
PERSONAL SECRETARY—Mrs. C. Rowlands
ANNUNCIATOR SUPERINTENDENT—A. Wilkinson
ANNUNCIATOR OPERATORS—J. A. Griffin, R. Quirk

REFRESHMENT DEPARTMENT

DIRECTOR OF CATERING SERVICES—Sue Harrison, MHCIMA
FINANCE AND ADMINISTRATION MANAGER—Janet Rissen
EXECUTIVE CHEF—David Dorricott
FOOD AND BEVERAGE OPERATIONS MANAGER—Robert J. Gibbs
ASSISTANT FOOD AND BEVERAGE MANAGER—Karin Hindermann
ASSISTANT FOOD AND BEVERAGE MANAGER—Mark Kemp
CATERING MANAGER, MEMBERS' TEA ROOM, TERRACE AND PRESS CAFETERIAS—Thomas Waterfall
CATERING MANAGER, BELLAMY'S—Sabina Barbato
CATERING MANAGER, PORTCULLIS HOUSE—Christina Gotthard
CATERING MANAGER, MILLBANK—
BANQUETING MANAGER—Manuel Amberg
BANQUETING CO-ORDINATORS—Diane Elderfield, Jason Bonello
TRAINING FACILITATOR—Patricia Macaulay-Fraser
CATERING OPERATIONS MANAGER—Della Herd
PURCHASING AND STORES MANAGER—Sara McKinnon-Snell
PURCHASING AND STORES CO-ORDINATOR—Tiffany Boardman
ASSISTANT PURCHASING MANAGER—Jason Cutts
SYSTEMS MANAGER—Jeremy Dunderdale
SYSTEMS CO-ORDINATOR—Michael Simons
FINANCE MANAGER—Jackie Stone (maternity leave) Patricia Daly (maternity cover)
ACCOUNTS OFFICE—Kate Hunt, Kate Lapidge, Mattena Stephenson, Karen Barnett, Hannah Scott, John Robson, Ryan McNeelance
PERSONAL ASSISTANT TO THE DIRECTOR OF CATERING SERVICES—Belinda Woodiwiss
PERSONNEL MANAGER—Johan van den Broek
PERSONNEL OFFICER—Mary-Louise Arens (maternity leave) Greg Walker (maternity cover)
PERSONNEL ASSISTANT—Sarah Grundy (temporary)
DEPARTMENTAL SECRETARY—Louise Torry (Director's Office)
HEAD CHEF—Laurence Colmer
SENIOR SOUS CHEF—Nick Wort
SOUS CHEFS—Sean MacNelis (Portcullis Kitchen), Dave Jenner (Bellamy's Kitchen) Terry Wiggins (Press Kitchen), David Bickford (Principal Kitchen), Stuart Lancashire (Millbank Kitchens), Krim Bekri (Principal Kitchen), Nick Munting (Larder Principal Kitchen)
KITCHEN CO-ORDINATOR—Caroline Beresford-Jones
HEAD WAITERS—Frederick Fortin (Churchill Room), Catherine Joyce (Strangers' Dining Room), Joe Vidal (Members' Dining Room), Jo Ferreira (Press Dining Room), Roy Duarte (Banqueting)
CAFETERIA SUPERVISORS—Annemarie Newman (Terrace) (maternity leave) Paula Fitzpatrick (maternity cover), Karen Hodsden (Members' Tea Room), Lisa Broadfoot (Bellamy's), Daphne Aimes (Press), Ann O'Neill (Portcullis House - Debate), Linda Glasspole (Portcullis House - Adjournment), Kathy Carr (Portcullis Cafeteria, Millbank), Cathy Walsh (Terrace - Evening), Noelene Delaney (Members' Tea Room - Evening), Janice Spriggs (Millbank Room)
SOUVENIR KIOSK SUPERVISOR—Joseph Alba-Alcala

OTHER PRINCIPAL OFFICERS

CLERK OF THE CROWN IN CHANCERY—Sir Hayden Phillips, KCB
COMPTROLLER AND AUDITOR GENERAL—Sir John Bourn, KCB
PARLIAMENTARY COMMISSIONER FOR ADMINISTRATION—M. S. Buckley

13 November 2002

THE PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE SECOND SESSION OF THE FIFTY-THIRD PARLIAMENT OF THE UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND
[WHICH OPENED 13 JUNE 2001]

FIFTY-FIRST YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 394**

FIRST VOLUME OF SESSION 2002–2003

House of Commons

Wednesday 13 November 2002

The House met at twenty-five minutes past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Message to attend Her Majesty:

The House went; and having returned:

The sitting was suspended until half-past Two o'clock, and then resumed.

2.30 pm

On resuming—

SESSIONAL ORDERS

ELECTIONS

Ordered,

That all Members who are returned for two or more places in any part of the United Kingdom do make their Election for which of the places they will serve, within one week after it shall appear that there is no question upon the Return for that place; and if any thing shall come in question touching the Return or Election of any Member, he is to withdraw during the time the matter is in debate; and that all Members returned upon double Returns do withdraw till their Returns are determined.

Resolved,

That if it shall appear that any person has been elected or returned a Member of this House, or endeavoured so to be by bribery, or any other corrupt practices, this House will proceed with the utmost severity against all such persons as shall have been wilfully concerned in such bribery or other corrupt practices.

WITNESSES

Resolved,

That if it shall appear that any person has been tampering with any Witness, in respect of his evidence to be given to this House, or any Committee thereof, or directly or indirectly has endeavoured to deter or hinder any person from appearing or giving evidence, the same is declared to be a high crime and misdemeanour, and this House will proceed with the utmost severity against such offender.

Resolved,

That if it shall appear that any person has given false evidence in any case before this House, or any Committee thereof, this House will proceed with the utmost severity against such offender.

METROPOLITAN POLICE

Ordered,

That the Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis do take care that during the Session of Parliament the passages through the streets leading to this House be kept free and open and that no obstruction be permitted to hinder the passage of Members to and from this House and that no disorder be allowed in Westminster Hall, or in the passages leading to this House during the Sitting of Parliament, and that there be no annoyance therein or thereabouts; and that the Serjeant at Arms attending this House do communicate this Order to the Commissioner aforesaid.

VOTES AND PROCEEDINGS

Ordered,

That the Votes and Proceedings of this House be printed, being first perused by the Speaker; and that he do appoint the printing thereof; and that no person but such as he shall appoint do presume to print the same.

OUTLAWRIES

A Bill for the more effectual preventing Clandestine Outlawries was read the First time, and ordered to be read a Second time.

Queen's Speech

Mr. Speaker: I have to acquaint the House that this House has this day attended Her Majesty in the House of Peers, and that Her Majesty was pleased to make a Most Gracious Speech from the Throne to both Houses of Parliament, of which I have, for greater accuracy, obtained a copy.

I shall direct that the terms of the Gracious Speech be printed in the Votes and Proceedings. Copies are available in the Vote Office.

The Gracious Speech was as follows:

My Lords and Members of the House of Commons

My Government's main priorities are economic stability, investment and reform in public services and a constructive foreign policy.

To this end, my Government will maintain sound public finances and will continue to take action to secure high levels of employment.

This approach will enable my Government to continue to invest in the public services, while supporting major programmes of reform on health, education, transport and crime.

At the heart of my Government's legislative programme is a commitment to reform and rebalance the criminal justice system to deliver justice for all and to safeguard the interests of victims, witnesses and communities.

A Bill will be introduced to reform sentencing arrangements and criminal procedures.

Sentencing will be reformed to ensure that the punishment is appropriate for the offender. New types of sentence will be introduced to protect the public from dangerous offenders, help reduce re-offending and deal with young offenders.

The Bill will also allow retrials for those acquitted of serious offences where new and compelling evidence emerges. It will also simplify the rules of evidence to allow judge and jury to hear all the facts, including relevant previous convictions of a defendant.

Legislation will also be introduced to reform the courts system. It will bring together Magistrates' Courts and the Crown Court to work more effectively under a single organisation. New sanctions will allow courts to enforce the payment of fines more efficiently.

My Government will introduce a Bill to tackle anti-social behaviour that damages communities.

A Bill will be brought forward to modernise the laws on sexual offences and to strengthen the framework of penalties for sex offenders to protect the public.

A Bill will also be introduced to improve international co-operation in tackling crime, including drugs trafficking, and to modernise the arrangements for international mutual assistance to catch criminals.

My Government will bring forward legislation to streamline the licensing system for premises selling alcohol. This will abolish fixed opening hours and introduce a range of measures to reduce anti-social behaviour.

My Government will continue to modernise the delivery of healthcare based on the founding principles of the National Health Service.

Legislation will be brought forward to devolve power and resources to frontline staff; give greater freedom to successful hospitals while increasing their accountability to local communities; and to introduce an independent health inspectorate.

A Bill will also be introduced to help ensure that local authorities support older people awaiting discharge from hospital.

Raising educational standards remains my Government's main priority for Britain's future prosperity. Secondary school reform will continue to promote opportunity and choice through greater diversity for parents and pupils. University reform proposals will be published to improve access and build on excellence.

My Government wants to create a welfare state based on giving people rights and responsibilities. They will pursue proposals that focus on the importance of work as part of our social security system. They will also bring forward proposals to tackle problems of truancy.

A Bill will be brought forward to establish a Railway Accident Investigation Branch in the light of Lord Cullen's recommendations on transport safety and reform the way railways are regulated to improve services for the public.

My Government will introduce a Bill to modernise local government by improving the delivery of local services through better financial management and greater freedom for councils based on performance. Legislation will also be introduced to provide for the holding of referendums on the issue of regional governance in England.

Legislation will be brought forward to reform the broadcasting and telecommunications industry by promoting competition and investment and giving powers to the Office of Communications.

Measures will be brought forward to protect our environment including legislation on the conservation and proper management of water.

My Government will also introduce legislation to speed up the planning system while improving the involvement of local communities.

Members of the House of Commons

Estimates for the Public Services will be laid before you.

My Lords and Members of the House of Commons

In Northern Ireland, my Government will continue to work closely with the political parties and the Irish Government to secure the full implementation of the Belfast Agreement. Legislation will be brought forward on policing in Northern Ireland.

My Government maintains its commitment to devolution in Scotland and Wales. A Bill will be introduced to reform the provision of health services in Wales.

A Bill will be introduced to enable Parliament to reach a conclusion on hunting with dogs.

Parliament will be invited to scrutinise legislation in draft on a number of measures, reflecting the importance that my Government places on pre-legislative scrutiny by Parliament.

Legislation in draft will be published to improve both housing standards and standards of management of private rented accommodation by landlords.

Draft legislation will be published on the management of nuclear liabilities. A draft Bill will also be published to reform the laws on corruption.

My Government looks forward to considering the report from the Joint Committee on House of Lords Reform.

Other measures will be laid before you.

My Lords and Members of the House of Commons

The Duke of Edinburgh and I look forward to paying a visit to Belgium next spring and to receiving the state visit of His Excellency the President of Russia next summer.

My Government will work for rapid progress on enlargement of the European Union, notably at next month's European Council meeting in Copenhagen. Legislation will be introduced to enable the United Kingdom to ratify the Accession Treaty with prospective member states.

My Government will make a decision on whether to recommend entry into the single currency on the basis of the assessment of the Five Economic Tests to be completed by next June.

The forthcoming NATO Summit in Prague will emphasise the Alliance's continuing role as the cornerstone of Britain's national security. My Government will continue work for an enlarged and even more effective NATO, enjoying a close partnership with Russia.

My Government will continue to play a leading role in combating terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, which are among the most serious threats to the security of the United Kingdom and our allies. My Government will continue to work with the international community to ensure the implementation of all United Nations Security Council Resolutions.

My Government will work for rapid and effective implementation of the agreements reached at the World Summit for Sustainable Development in Johannesburg and will focus on tackling climate change and finding new ways to meet our energy needs.

My Government will continue to work for a more effective global effort to reduce poverty, building on the United Nations Millennium Development Goals and on progress achieved at the recent Monterrey Conference on Financing for Development. Britain's aid budget will be increased and we will work to implement the Africa Action Plan in response to the New Partnership for Africa's Development.

My Government will work for a successful outcome to the current round of world trade negotiations that benefits industrialised and developing countries alike.

My Lords and Members of the House of Commons

I pray that the blessing of Almighty God may rest upon your counsels.

Debate on the Address

[First Day]

Mr. Speaker: It may be helpful if I announce to the House that the proposed pattern of debate for the remaining days of debate on the Queen's Speech will be as follows: Thursday 14 November—health and pensions; Friday 15 November—education, culture, media and sport; Monday 18 November—economy and trade and industry; Tuesday 19 November—regional and local government, transport and Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs; Wednesday 20 November—home affairs.

I now call on Mr. George Foulkes to move the Address, and Ms Oona King will second it.

2.36 pm

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): I beg to move,

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, as follows:

Most Gracious Sovereign,

We, Your Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, in Parliament assembled, beg leave to offer our humble thanks to Your Majesty for the Gracious Speech which Your Majesty has addressed to both Houses of Parliament.

It is a great privilege and a real pleasure for me to be asked to move the Address together with my hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Bow (Ms King). To be honest, I wondered "Why me?" My good friend and fellow seventy-niner, my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Shettleston (Mr. Marshall), mischievously suggested that the answer could be traced back to August 1999. That was when my daughter, Jenny, gave birth to a son and made me a very proud grandfather for the first time. I did not say, "We are a grandfather", but the parents were in a quandary about what first name to give him.

Bob Russell (Colchester): Tony.

Mr. Foulkes: Wait for it. Eventually, Jenny came to tell me the decision and she was disconcerted that I burst out laughing when she told me the name. My grandson was to be called Blair. *[Laughter.]* I assure the House that I had no influence whatever over the decision—well, consciously. Blair is a popular first name in Scotland—honestly—but it does have interesting consequences.

On the Sunday after the election—a day when Ministers and aspiring Ministers and their telephones are almost inseparable—the phone rang at my home in Ayr. It was someone from *The Scotsman,* and Jenny answered. She said, "I am sorry. He's not here; he's with Blair all afternoon. Can you phone back this evening?" I was already imagining *The Scotsman* sub-editor drafting the headline, "Foulkes for Foreign Secretary". [Hon. Members: "Hear, hear."] Unfortunately that cheer came from Conservative Members. *The Scotsman* phoned back that evening and said with some awe, "We hear that you have been with Blair all afternoon." I said, "Yes, I took him for a walk." The penny dropped.

[Mr. Foulkes]

Thankfully, the phone rang again the next day and this time it was my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister. I was back not as Foreign Secretary, but as No. 2 to my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Ladywood (Clare Short) in the Department for International Development, where I belonged.

That brings me to what must be the real reason that I am now on my feet. It goes back over 23 years, to 22 May 1979, when I made my maiden speech in the Queen's Speech debate. This is a reward—or is it a punishment?—for surviving that long. The Defence Secretary rather ungallantly told me that I had got the old codger's spot today—*[Interruption.]* But that was untypical of him.

When thinking of what to say, I received an unusually helpful suggestion from my hon. Friend the Member for Cunninghame, South (Mr. Donohoe). He suggested that I check who was the last Scottish Member to propose such a motion, as opposed to my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, South (Miss Begg) and my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Edinburgh, Pentlands (Dr. Clark), who seconded them so eloquently. I was delighted to find out that George Younger in 1990 was the last. For 13 years, George was my neighbouring MP and, notwithstanding our political differences, we co-operated very closely on local issues. Other Scots Members described us as the Ayrshire mafia, probably rightly. He was known locally as Gentleman George—why do I never get called that? Anyway, he deserved it.

Once, I met a delegation of protesting councillors coming out of a meeting with him at St. Andrew's house when he was Secretary of State for Scotland. They said that it had been an excellent meeting, but when I asked them whether he had agreed to their demands they said, "Oh no, but he was very nice." Sometimes, being a gentleman can be politically useful as well.

George mentioned in that speech in 1990 that the most important constituency issue that he faced was the future of Prestwick airport, which had then declined to the point where it had almost no passenger traffic. He and I soon afterwards persuaded BAA to sell it and George became chair of the company that bought it—I do not know why they did not think of me—and the airport never looked back. My hon. Friend the current Member for Ayr (Sandra Osborne) has assiduously followed in his footsteps and now it is the fastest growing airport in Britain. Two new air links were announced from the airport in the last two weeks. Sadly, George Younger is unwell and I am sure that hon. Members in all parts of the House would wish George to know that our thoughts are with him today.

In my maiden speech, as tradition suggests, I spoke about my constituency. I just want to add a few remarks today because this is an honour for the constituency as well as for me. My constituency is the cradle of the Labour party. Keir Hardie, the founder of our party, made it his home from 1880 until his death in 1915 and he returned there even when he represented West Ham and Merthyr here in the Commons. Keir Hardie's first manifesto included three key aims: home rule, a minimum wage and temperance. It has taken this Labour Government to achieve two of those three—and, may I say it, the right two.

My constituency has, since the time when Keir Hardie was secretary of the Ayrshire miners, had a proud coal mining tradition, yet it is also one of the most beautiful in the country. It contains the birthplace of Scotland's bard, Robert Burns, and many of the places mentioned in his magnificent works, so it is a great honour for me to have represented it for the past 23 years, although the effects of all those Burns suppers have taken their toll.

I searched the poems and songs of Robert Burns to find a suitable verse for this occasion. Fortunately, no song seemed appropriate. I was going to suggest that

"The best laid schemes of mice and men gang aft agley

And leave us naught but grief and pain

For promised joy"

could now be an ode to the Leader of the Opposition, but I am not a cruel person, so I will not. Instead, I chose the lines

"O would some power the giftie gie us

To see ourselves as others see us".

Robert Burns was ahead of his time: he thought of focus groups even before new Labour.

In that Queen's Speech debate in 1979, the Leader of the Opposition, Jim Callaghan—I, like almost everyone, if not everyone here, have always had a great respect and deep affection for him—sought a guarantee from the new Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, whom I cannot say the same about, that overseas aid would be exempt from her planned cuts in expenditure. She refused to give such an undertaking. Sadly, she was true to her word and spending on aid halved in 18 years. In contrast, by the end of this Parliament, spending on development will have more than doubled since 1997, and it is moving steadily towards the United Nations target; and there is much more.

The new Department for International Development and our whole Government are leading the world in securing both debt relief and trade preferences for the poorest countries of the world, and the reaffirmation in the Queen's Speech is particularly welcome. The Prime Minister, the Chancellor and particularly the Secretary of State for International Development deserve our huge praise for that. Although my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State is not a prophet without honour in her own country, I know from my four years as her deputy that she is also held in even higher regard by world leaders, including the president of the World Bank, James Wolfensohn, and the Secretary-General of the UN, Kofi Annan. We should be really proud of her.

My only sadness is that that is one of the many achievements of our Labour Government that is too often taken for granted. It reminds me of "Monty Python's Life of Brian". I think that Eric Idle, the leader of the Judean People's Front—

Chris Ruane (Vale of Clwyd): People's Front of Judea.

Mr. Foulkes: No, it was a breakaway from the People's Front of Judea. I think that Eric Idle asked, "What have the Romans ever done for us?" The reply—I think that it was from John Cleese—was, "Well, roads, cities, a legal system, running water, drainage, wine, and, of course, peace on the streets." The ungrateful native responds, "Yes, but apart from roads, cities,

a legal system, running water, drainage, wine and peace on the streets." I am sure that the Prime Minister knows how the Romans felt.

As well as a doubling of development spending, we have a minimum wage, the lowest unemployment for a generation, the lowest inflation and mortgage rates since the Beatles, reform of the House of Lords, a Parliament for Scotland, an Assembly for Wales, and much more that is far too easily discounted, set aside and taken for granted. It is also too easy, and far too glib, for some commentators and some of our critics to pretend that this Labour Government are no different from a Tory Government. It would have been very strange had a Tory Queen's Speech announced a national minimum wage, an end to the hereditary principle, devolution to Scotland and Wales, and statutory union recognition, to name but a few measures. The Leader of the Opposition would have had even more rebels with such a list of proposals.

That brings me to this year's Queen's Speech—not before time. Notwithstanding the progress of the last five and a half years, there is still more to be done, particularly to bring peace to our streets. The proposals outlined this morning, focusing on crime and antisocial behaviour, will take that forward. May I add seriously, as a Scottish MP, that the problems are no different in Scotland? The problem of drugs is the same in Cumnock as it is in Cannock. Vandalism, graffiti and antisocial tenants are no less of a problem in Doon Valley than they are in Don Valley. Where responsibility is devolved, therefore, I hope that my colleagues in the Scottish Parliament will not be deflected by any nationalist tendency from applying similar solutions, within the context, of course, of our legal system.

It is also particularly pleasing to me that the Gracious Speech includes such a positive reaffirmation of the Government's intention to decide on joining the single currency, once the five tests have been met—*[Laughter.]* Hon. Members will recognise that I can read the Chancellor's writing. Far be it from me to anticipate the outcome, but I look forward to campaigning vigorously and enthusiastically for the euro when the day comes, as do the vast majority of my colleagues.

As one of the 1979 intake, too, Mr. Speaker, you know that I am one of the few who survived those 18 long years in opposition—you remember them well—to serve in Government for five years. I enjoyed that enormously, and I am proud to have served what I believe to be a radical reforming Government under a great Prime Minister. The even greater honour, however, is to serve as a Member of this House. As an MP, I have had the joy of celebrating the return of democracy to Chile in the plebiscite, of visiting South Africa when the evil of apartheid had been swept away and everyone was able to vote—they queued for hours to do so—and of seeing eastern Europe before and after the liberation from the tyranny of communist dictatorship. That is why I am eager for us to explore ways of ensuring that every one of our citizens is enabled to exercise their vote. It is also why I am once again spending many hours each week in the Chamber, at the epicentre of our democracy, listening as well as occasionally intervening. That is why it is such an honour to move the Loyal Address today and to be followed by such an able and delightful seconder. I commend the Gracious Speech to the House.

2.50 pm

Ms Oona King (Bethnal Green and Bow): I second the motion. It is a particular pleasure to follow my right hon. Friend the Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes).

Tony Worthington (Clydebank and Milngavie): Well said.

Ms King: I was coming to that. I have taken some time in preparing my speech, most of it spent practising saying the name of my right hon. Friend's constituency.

My right hon. Friend is one of the longer serving Members of the House. Traditionally, the parliamentary honour of moving and seconding the Queen's Speech falls, so I am told, to two types of MP: the younger whippersnapper MP-type and the old—I should say older—and wise, but not weary, parliamentary sage MP-type. It is up to us to guess who is who. My right hon. Friend needed all his sage-like qualities when he became an International Development Minister. All politicians say that they want to make the world a better place, but my right hon. Friend did not just say that, he did it, when he worked with the Secretary of State for International Development. For that he deserves our thanks.

It is also traditional, when seconding the Queen's Speech, for MPs to say that their constituency is the jewel in the crown. I hate it when MPs get proprietorial, but there is only one constituency that has the jewel in the crown—indeed, it has the Crown jewels—and it is mine; it is the beautiful, the bountiful, the historical Bethnal Green and Bow. A collection of picturesque hamlets nestled around the Tower, we are Tower Hamlets.

Though not without our problems, we have what any estate agent will say is the most important thing: location, location, location. On top of that, we have education—I will not repeat the mantra—and since the Government came to power in 1997, the young people of Tower Hamlets have made the greatest educational improvement of any young people in this country. As we have the highest density of poverty, I hope that everyone shares my pride and pleasure in that improvement.

It is just as well that improvement has taken place, because London's centre of gravity is moving east. We have the transport infrastructure to sustain that: City airport, Stansted, the docklands light railway and the Jubilee line extension. In addition, we are hoping, Mr. Chancellor, for the long-awaited Crossrail. I hope that local east-enders will benefit for the first time from that prosperity. To summarise, in my humble opinion, east London is the future of the planet.

When I became an east London MP, one of my predecessors to second the Queen's Speech, Neil Kinnock, gave me some advice. He said, "Oona, if you want to succeed at Westminster, you've got to do three things. First, you must specialise. If you don't, it'll set you back 10 years. Second, you must stop swearing. Third, you must stop wearing micro miniskirts." I stopped wearing micro miniskirts and finally specialised in two areas: housing and genocide. Like all MPs, I worked on many other issues, but the cry went out from my office to any journalist who rang, "Housing or

[Ms King]

genocide. Housing or genocide. She'll talk about anything as long it is housing or genocide." The phones went dead.

Why housing and genocide? Housing because it is the issue that affects my constituents most, and genocide because it is the issue that affects me most, and gives me most sleepless nights. It is apt that just 48 hours ago we commemorated the end of the second world war and the horror of the holocaust. When soldiers returned from the first world war, they were promised homes fit for heroes. I must congratulate the Liberals—I hope my hon. Friends do not lynch me for it—*[Interruption.]* I shall tell the House why. It was a Liberal politician who came out with the phrase "homes fit for heroes".

Of course, that was all spin and no trousers, and a Labour Government had to be elected to deliver those homes, which we did with the Wheatley Act in 1924. It has always been thus: if people want more money to be put into affordable housing, they have to elect a Labour Government. It was recognised after the second world war, as it must be recognised today, especially in our debate about public services, that housing is the most fundamental public service. Again, a Labour Government are introducing legislation to increase the amount of decent, affordable housing, and I warmly welcome the measures outlined in the Queen's Speech.

Most of the constituents who come to see me say that their biggest problem is housing, followed by, and often inextricably linked to, antisocial behaviour. In areas such as mine, a lot of antisocial behaviour is linked to race. Frankly, I am sick to death of race, but if you are black, it is a bit like having a stalker, and you cannot get away from it. I have been very lucky; I have not suffered much racism. I am very light-skinned, to put it crudely, and I had to wait until I became an MP before I got death threats because of my race.

I remember, however, the first time I was materially affected by my race. I was 18 and staying in a very down-market youth hostel in America—$6 a night for a mattress and $4 if people shared. For no apparent reason, the owner of the hostel suddenly marched up to me and shouted, "We don't have niggers like you here." He went upstairs and threw all my belongings out of a first-floor window. First, there was the humiliation of having my things scattered all over the street; secondly, I had a problem in that I had nowhere to sleep that night; thirdly, rage engulfed me and started to drive me mad.

That experience taught me two things. First, if people are subjected to racial abuse they will, if they are average, like me, either go mad or try to get even, neither of which we want to happen. Secondly, race is no longer—as if it ever was—black or white. The man who threw me out of the hostel was Asian. The most unprejudiced, non-racist person I have ever met is my mother, who is white. The worst racial abuse that I saw while I was growing up was inflicted on Asian children by white and Afro-Caribbean children together. The icons of the 20th century who did most to inspire respect for universal human rights were black and Asian: Martin Luther King, Nelson Mandela and Mahatma Gandhi. To think that any race has a monopoly on racism, or on virtue, is absurd. Last year in Tower Hamlets, 42 per cent. of the victims of racial crime were white and over 50 per cent. were Asian or Afro-Caribbean.

As I said, I am sick of talking about race, so I want to ask the House a favour. As long as I am one of only two black or ethnic minority women ever elected to the British Parliament, I am not going to get this stalker off my back. So if there is any chance of having a representative democracy any time soon, I would be really grateful. Not a single Asian woman has ever been elected to this Chamber, and white women are not doing very well either. People ask me, "What's it like now there are so many Labour women MPs?" If we add up the numbers of MPs called John, David or Michael, we find that there are more of them—107—than there are of us. To all those outside the Chamber who are waiting for the revolution, I say, "Don't hold your breath."

I hope that hon. Members will indulge me if my final subject is a recent parliamentary visit to Rwanda, which leads me, predictably, to genocide. Some hon. Members will know that I chair the all-party parliamentary group on Rwanda—the group on the great lakes region and genocide prevention. Last month, six MPs took part in an Inter-Parliamentary Union delegation to Rwanda. None of us will forget the small church we visited. Everywhere inside were scattered items—a shoe, a football, a bag, a jumper, a bone, then another bone—and as we looked, we realised that everywhere we turned there were bones. All I could see were hips, skulls, arms and legs. On a makeshift altar at the end of the church sat a single skull, peering out over former friends and family, now scattered, mingled and crushed in the most diabolical human rubbish tip.

That memorial site is slowly turning to dust. Without preservation, evidence of the crime will disappear. Rwanda does not have the money to build its equivalent of Israel's Yad Vashem. Forgive me for asking, but if there is anyone out there listening who, in the spirit of Remembrance Sunday, could contribute to preserving the memories of those who died in a more recent holocaust, please let me know.

While those 5,000 people in the church and up to 1 million people elsewhere were being murdered, the United Nations did nothing—well, not absolutely nothing. In 1998, with the Select Committee on International Development, I visited a genocide site, where I picked my way through 10,000 corpses. The UN had come in after all the killing was done and put up curtains with the UN logo on them—perhaps to keep off the flies, I do not know: surely the most perverse case of window dressing in history.

The fact is that the UN did nothing because we did nothing. The lesson that we must recall today is that the UN is only as strong as the resolve of its member states. I am the UN's harshest critic, but also its most passionate advocate, because if we had had an effective United Nations, the genocide in Rwanda would have been averted. To have an effective UN, we must do two things: root out the appalling double standards that cripple international relations, and prove that the UN means business. We cannot allow countries—any country—to flout UN resolutions, and we must enforce those resolutions.

I know that traditionally, this is a light, breezy, cheerful little speech, so I will conclude by telling the House what happened in Rwanda four weeks ago when

six MPs, including me, came face to face with a gorilla that made King Kong look like a chihuahua. I have a visual aid here—I know that that is a bit modern, but Parliament is hurtling towards modernity, and I think that our little time capsule here in the House of Commons will be rapping on the doors of the 1950s any minute now, so I trust that hon. Members will not be perturbed if I use this visual aid, which shows the gorilla in question.

When the picture was taken, I was standing about 15 ft away from that huge silverback gorilla. On my left I had a Conservative Front-Bench spokesman, whom I see in his place now, and on my right, I had a Conservative Whip—not necessarily the private militia I would have chosen for my defence in the circumstances. I was terrified—I distinctly remember asking, "Anyone up for getting out of here while we're ahead?" No answer—silence. Twenty seconds later, the gorilla charged. I am not joking, and I do not mean it charged in the other direction—it charged towards us.

The Conservative Front-Bench spokesman on my left was remarkably cool, calm and collected—*[Interruption.]* He did not faint. Incredibly, however, the Conservative Whip on my right grabbed me by both shoulders, stood behind me and used me as a human shield—*[Laughter.]* It is with great regret that I must report to the House that there are elements in the Opposition Whips Office who will not hesitate to use the tactics of the butcher of Baghdad. For that reason, I hope that we will all give the Leader of the Opposition our sympathy if he chooses, as he may well do following recent events, to open up his party to weapons inspectors.

I do not mean to be too harsh, because during my time in Parliament I have made good friends on both sides of the House. Despite our shortcomings, and despite what people read about us in the press, there are some wonderful people in this place who work as politicians. I therefore commend this House of Commons to the country, and this Queen's Speech to the House.

3.5 pm

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green): It gives me great pleasure to congratulate the proposer and seconder of the Loyal Address, but before I do so, I shall pay tribute to Jamie Cann and Sir Ray Powell. Jamie Cann was an independent-minded and much-respected Member of Parliament. He was also an effective member of the Select Committee on Defence, but he will be remembered above all for his commitment to his Ipswich constituents, whose interests he always fought for. I am reminded that when the Ministry of Defence planned to sell a local airbase to the Natural Law party, he warned that it was handing it over to

"a bunch of nutters who will use it to bounce up and down on their backsides".

He was clearly thinking of his experiences in the House. I know that the whole House will join me today in honouring Jamie Cann's memory.

Sir Ray Powell served Ogmore for more than 20 years, and was a fearless champion of the Welsh valleys. He could not exactly be described as a pioneer of new Labour—indeed, he delighted in being a Labour Member of the old school. I am told that, as a Whip after the 1987 election, he magnificently kept Ken Livingstone without an office or phone for an entire year. There is not a commuter in London who does not wish that someone could do that today. Ray Powell and Jamie Cann will both be greatly missed.

Let me now turn to the proposer and seconder of the Loyal Address. I congratulate the right hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) on a most spirited speech—no old codger he, I promise him. I can safely say that no one in the House has ever given as much publicity as him to the cause of the Scotch Whisky Association, on which we highly commend him—Keir Hardie roll over. Asked whether he saw himself as old or new Labour, he endearingly described himself as "slightly shop-soiled Labour". He has campaigned to ban many things, including smoking and proportional representation—but not drinking—and even once introduced a Bill to ban space invaders. Perhaps he was thinking of the right hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson), who said recently that he was "put on earth" to be a Minister. He has returned to his mother ship for the moment—but, I remind the Prime Minister, is ready to come back.

Some unkindly souls regarded the departure of the right hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley from the Scotland Office as a demotion, but, like him, I know that he has been promoted to a far more powerful position in new Labour. He is now one of the Prime Minister's special envoys. I warn him that the next step is to become one of the Prime Minister's tennis partners—I am not sure whether he will appreciate that. He has made a long career, both in office and in opposition, of fighting for the cause of the developing world and battling injustice. Today's powerful speech shows that he has lost none of his fighting spirit, and I genuinely congratulate him on an excellent contribution.

I also warmly congratulate my fellow east Londoner, the hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Bow (Ms King). Like many in the House, I knew her predecessor, Lord Shore—a man I admired and was personally fond of—who sadly passed away during the last Session. I know that, as an assiduous constituency Member, as well as a man of great principle, he would be smiling with pride today at her performance. The only surprise for us came when she held up the picture; everybody on the Opposition Benches wondered which colleague's picture she was showing.

I gather that when the hon. Lady was a teenager she said that she wanted to be both Prime Minister and an air hostess. There is consistency in her ambition: air hostesses and the Prime Minister spend their days repeating the same pre-prepared and utterly predictable announcements before jetting off around the world. She knows—perhaps more than most, I understand—that being a close friend of this Prime Minister can be a more hazardous affair than it sounds. She says that she once caught the flu after being kissed by him. Ah, that infectious charm of the Prime Minister!

To avoid any doubts, let me quickly tell the House that the hon. Lady says of her Italian husband:

"He is Andy Garcia-gorgeous, speaks five languages including Japanese, has a black belt in karate, does all the cleaning and shopping, and cooks the most fantastic Italian food."

Now we know why she has campaigned for so long and so hard to change the hours in this place: she wants to get home a bit earlier. I am not sure whether it will help

[Mr. Iain Duncan Smith]

her career, but I also understand and I should reveal to the House that even my predecessor in Chingford, Lord Tebbit, has had very warm words to say about her. It might be helpful in the future if she would tell me how she managed to pull that one off.

The hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Bow has worked tirelessly to combat the evil of drugs at home and the evil of genocide abroad. Her work in the countries around the central African great lakes has brought the region's suffering to the attention of the whole House, and her speech today reminds us all why she is such a powerful champion of every issue that she takes up. I am glad that Neil Kinnock gave her the advice that he did, and I congratulate her warmly on a tremendous speech.

As the hon. Lady knows only too well, the new Session of Parliament will bring not only a new legislative programme but new procedures in the House to govern the scrutiny of it. We will do all that we can to make those reforms work, but we are determined to ensure that they do not result in less effective scrutiny of proposed legislation or an easier ride for the Executive. Many hon. Members in all parts of the House will agree that in recent years and under Governments of both parties the Executive have grown stronger and Parliament weaker, so we will watch the new procedures very carefully indeed.

The coming Session will, I believe, be overshadowed by global events. If anyone ever doubted that 11 September would be more than a horrendous but isolated event, the devastating bombing in Bali showed that international terror can strike any time, anywhere. As the daily alerts remind us, Britain is a prime target. This is the most critical issue facing our nation. The Government know that from the outset, from the Conservative party at least, they have received the fullest support and will continue to do so.

International terror takes many forms, which is why we strongly backed the American and British drive to get a toughly worded Security Council resolution on Iraq's weapons of mass destruction. We are immensely pleased that the resolution has now been passed. Saddam has run out of places to hide. He faces a simple choice: accept the will of the international community, or have that will imposed upon him.

Terror at home and abroad is never easy to fight in a democratic society. We all want our security, but we want our freedom too; it is the job of the Opposition to make sure that the Government strike the right balance between the two. In that spirit, we welcome the emergency planning Bill. It is clearly both timely and sensible to examine our ability to cope with a major terrorist attack. We will examine the detail of the Bill when it is published. We will support measures to help the security services, but we will oppose vigorously any new powers to arrest and deport British citizens for activities that are not crimes here in the United Kingdom.

There are other parts of the Queen's Speech that we can welcome. We will support measures to introduce a single media regulator, provided that it has a very light touch, although we ask this question: why does the BBC appear to be excluded from its remit? We back licensing reform, provided that the interests of local residents are properly protected. We support moves to strengthen protection of children. When the Home Secretary introduces the sex offences Bill, he should take on board the suggestions of my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) for strengthening the law on paedophiles.

We are also delighted with one omission from the Queen's Speech—the controversial mental health Bill. Many expert organisations in the field and many hon. Members on both sides of the House have grave reservations about the Government's proposals, so I hope that that omission signals a real change of heart.

We also note that the civil service Bill has not made it into the Queen's Speech. The hon. Member for Cannock Chase (Tony Wright), the Chairman of the Public Administration Committee, said after the Jo Moore affair that

"never has a civil service Bill been more necessary in Britain".

He is right. We need that Bill to restore trust and honesty to our public life.

Mr. Barry Gardiner (Brent, North): While the right hon. Gentleman is talking about omissions, will he clarify whether he agrees with the Government's proposals on antisocial behaviour orders, or with his hon. Friend the Member for Surrey Heath (Mr. Hawkins), who believes that they should be torn up?

Mr. Duncan Smith: The hon. Gentleman will have to wait until I reach that point, but we have heard it all before from the Government and it never seems to work.

With regard to honesty, let us come to the Liberal Democrats. The hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Lembit Öpik) recently said that his party should not

"put leaflets out which say untruths, or distort things in a dubious fashion".

He went on to say:

"our literature and party promotion should focus on our strengths."

But his colleagues, in a document sent round at the same time, said:

"You can secure support from voters who normally vote Tory by being effectively anti-Labour and similarly in a Tory area secure Labour votes by being anti-Tory".

It goes on:

"Be wicked, act shamelessly, stir endlessly."

That is the Liberal Democrats whom we know and love.

The Prime Minister has said that the Government are

"at our best when at our boldest".

[Interruption.] How the little voices often sound loudest, like empty barrels. We waited for evidence of that in the Queen's Speech, but the truth is that each year they promise bold measures, and each year it is the same old story. They promise real reform but they fail to deliver. The one thing that the Government and the Chancellor are delivering is higher taxes. There has been a rise of more than £100 billion since 1997—£38 per person per week—in taxes on pensions and petrol, mortgages and marriage, cars and congestion, houses, and now higher education. As Digby Jones, director general of the CBI, said this week:

"For five years the engine of wealth creation has been over-taxed and almost run into the ground."

From next April, national insurance contributions will rise by £8 billion a year—and that from a Prime Minister who, before 1997, said:

"We have no plans to increase taxes at all."

Five years on, Britain has overtaken Germany in the high-tax league. We are paying the taxes, but so much is getting worse—so much more.

Jim Knight (South Dorset) *rose—*

Mr. Duncan Smith: I will give way to the hon. Gentleman. Perhaps he can tell us all why the Prime Minister broke his pledge on taxes.

Jim Knight: The right hon. Gentleman talks about taxation, but does he agree with the increases in public expenditure that go with it?

Mr. Duncan Smith: The reality for the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues on the Front Bench is that the Government have failed to reform public services, which is why they are having to spend so much money. He should ask them why they do not reform public services. He did not answer the question because one cannot trust the Government.

The Queen's Speech is being debated on the day of the first firefighters' strike for 20 years—since, I must remind the House, the last Labour Government. Let me be absolutely clear: the decision to strike and to put people's lives at risk is wrong. When I asked the Prime Minister last month to let our soldiers have access to the most modern firefighting equipment and training, he said that he would not do so, because it might inflame the situation. The situation is now inflamed, so will he give the Army access to that modern equipment so that it can provide the protection that people need? When he speaks, perhaps he will explain exactly why not. The firefighters should call off their strike now.

Mr. Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton): The right hon. Gentleman refers to a question that he put to the Prime Minister in Prime Minister's questions. Will he explain why last week he flouted parliamentary convention by failing to notify me that he was going to refer to me and purport to quote me at Prime Minister's Question Time? Why, by selective quotation, did he distort—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Let the right hon. Gentleman make his intervention.

Mr. Kaufman: Why, by selective quotation, did the right hon. Gentleman distort what I said by omitting my comments on Gibraltar:

"this House . . . would not accept the sell-out of the Falklands by the Tory Government"?—[*Official Report*, 12 July 2002; Vol. 388, c. 1174.]

Why now—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The intervention is too long. I think that the right hon. Gentleman is saying that the Leader of the Opposition misquoted him.

Mr. Duncan Smith: How are the mighty fallen.

Mr. Kaufman *rose—*

Mr. Duncan Smith: I am not giving way to the right hon. Gentleman again.

Mr. Kaufman *rose—*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I cannot have two hon. Members on their feet at one time.

Mr. Duncan Smith: I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman will be able to write his apologies to the Prime Minister in his own way. I promise that I will not intervene.

It is not just union militancy that has got worse over the past five years under this Government, but a number of other things—for example, the crisis in pensions. The Chancellor has slapped a £5 billion tax on pension funds each year. We have the lowest savings ratio for 40 years. Fewer than four in 10 salary schemes are open to new members. Britain is in the grip of a Minister-made pensions crisis. There are no bold measures on pensions in the Queen's Speech—not one. So there is no real reform on pensions; just plans to scrap tax breaks on pensions for hard-working savers.

What about the crisis in transport? One in five trains do not reach their destinations on time. Delays on the tube have doubled since the Government took office. Their 10-year plan has been rubbished by the Transport Select Committee, which is dominated by the Prime Minister's own party. The transport system is in gridlock. There is no real reform in this Queen's Speech on transport; just, next year, more congestion charges for commuters in London.

There is a crisis in education. In the past three years, the number of serious assaults on teachers has nearly quadrupled. The number of teacher vacancies has doubled since the Government took office, and the A-level fiasco was a disaster for thousands of hard-working parents and students.

Ms Meg Munn (Sheffield, Heeley): Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that last week three head teachers told the Select Committee on Education and Skills that this year there were fewer remarkings of A-levels than in normal years?

Mr. Duncan Smith: It really is a shame when Labour Back Benchers have to get up to defend the disaster of those on the Front Bench, who have plunged A-levels into crisis.

I am aware also that the brand new Education Secretary recently said that the problem is that the Government have introduced

"Too many initiatives in too many directions."

[Mr. Duncan Smith]

He must have been thinking of the 4,500 regulations that the Government heaped on teachers year after year.

I have copies of the Government's answer to all the paperwork. First, there is "Good Practice in Cutting Bureaucracy Volume One", followed by "Good Practice in Cutting Bureaucracy Volume Two". They are to be used in conjunction with the "Bureaucracy Cutting Toolkit". The Prime Minister who promised us education, education, education has given us paperwork, paperwork, paperwork.

The Queen's Speech contains no bold measures to slash red tape and set teachers free to teach. There are therefore no bold reforms on education, only plans to hit hard-working families with top-up fees for university students.

Let us consider the crisis in health. Five years after the Prime Minister said that there were 24 hours to save the NHS, the health service has more administrators than beds. In Britain, the average wait for an operation exceeds four months. In France, the maximum is four weeks. In Britain, patients have to wait hours in accident and emergency; in Germany, the maximum wait is minutes. Most important, the Government's handling of health professionals has left morale at an all-time low.

Andy King (Rugby and Kenilworth): Will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that the £1.5 billion necessary to provide the private operations to which he is committed would come out of the NHS budget?

Mr. Duncan Smith: In the past year, 250,000 people had to go outside the health service to buy treatment. The Chancellor is not paying for them and the hon. Gentleman is not caring for them. Tell them what sort of care the health service provides.

We need bold action on health, but we shall get only 12 foundation hospitals out of the 250 hospital trusts. Bold health reform would make every hospital a foundation hospital.

Let us consider the crisis on our streets. Five years after the Prime Minister said that he would be tough on crime, a crime is committed every five seconds. The number of solved crimes has fallen by 18 per cent. in the past five years. Street crime has increased by almost a third in the past year. After five wasted years and 12 criminal justice measures, the Queen's Speech again promises action on crime.

The Government promised genuine reform but they failed to deliver. They said that there would be 5,000 antisocial behaviour orders a year, but only 300 were issued last year. They said that child safety orders would tackle antisocial behaviour, but four years after their introduction, only 12 have been issued. They said that child curfew zones would tackle antisocial behaviour, but, four years later, not a single local authority has issued one.

One does not fight crime by undermining the civil liberties of law-abiding citizens while allowing thugs and criminals to walk free.

Bob Spink (Castle Point): Will my right hon. Friend join me in calling for the Prime Minister to give police back the power to confiscate unopened cans and bottles of alcohol from youths and younger children on the streets, where they would otherwise consume the alcohol? The Government removed that power from the police under the Criminal Justice Act 2001.

Mr. Duncan Smith: I should love to ask the Prime Minister for a promise, but we get only promises from him, never delivery.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Leader of the Opposition is not giving way.

Mr. Duncan Smith: The Deputy Prime Minister usually misses out in the Queen's Speech. It is a pity that that has not happened again this year. The right hon. Gentleman has a Bill to tear up the map of Britain, to destroy our historic counties and to create a new layer of government that will employ fresh armies of bureaucrats and create a new mass of red tape. The Bill will impose a new tier of politicians on local people and place new burdens on business. That is not devolving power down; it is grabbing power up.

The Queen's Speech offers more of the same failed policies as before, with more edicts, more targets, more indicators, more centralisation, more spin and more control. It could have delivered so much. It could have given head teachers the final power to exclude unruly pupils. It could have offered treatment to all young heroin and cocaine addicts. It could have extended the right to buy to housing association tenants. It could have cut regulations for care homes and restored care beds. It could have made all hospitals foundation hospitals. It could have handed power back to doctors, nurses and teachers. It could have given choice to patients, parents and pupils. Finally, it could have offered genuine hope to the millions of people who work in and rely on our public services. It did none of these things. Instead, the Queens' Speech is just more of the same. Each year the Government promise real reform and each year they fail to deliver.

3.31 pm

The Prime Minister (Mr. Tony Blair): Before I respond to the mover and seconder of the Loyal Address, let me first pay tribute to our colleagues Jamie Cann and Sir Ray Powell, who died during the last Session. Jamie Cann served Ipswich for nearly 10 years as its Member of Parliament, and for many years before that as a member and later leader of Ipswich borough council. His sudden death was a sad loss to us all. As we all know, Jamie had strong views, which were often forcefully expressed, but he was immensely well respected. His funeral service was full to overflowing and the affection that the people of Ipswich had for him was clear to all. I know that the whole House will mourn his loss.

Sir Ray Powell's death after 22 years' service as a Member of Parliament was a great shock. Ray was known throughout the House as Whip and latterly Chairman of the Committee that oversaw the construction of Portcullis House. It was said of Ray—I know accurately—that he could predict the result of any

vote, and I mean any vote, in this place. It helped that he was the Whip in charge of accommodation. He was a true voice of the valleys, and all of us are the poorer for his loss. The House extends its condolences to the families of both Ray and Jamie.

I have heard many speeches proposing and seconding the Queen's Speech, from both sides of the Chamber and I have to say that I think the two we heard today were among the best that I have ever heard. I give my warmest congratulations to my right hon. Friend the Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes)—[HON. MEMBERS: "What about his grandson?"] I was reflecting on that. It is kind of my right hon. Friend to have called his grandson Blair, although I cannot promise him that if and when I have a grandson I will call him Foulkes. We will reflect on that. We can always set up a review.

My right hon. Friend made an immensely humorous and generous speech. It was the hallmark of him that when he spoke about his time as a Minister—he was very kind about my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State although he himself performed an enormous service and did a lot of tremendous work—what came through was what always comes through with him: his general optimism and hope for the future. It was an excellent speech and I commend him on it.

The statistic that impresses me most about my right hon. Friend is that when he was first elected in 1979, his majority was just 1,500. Last year it was 15,000. There were 22 Conservative Members in Scotland when my right hon. Friend was elected and now there is only one. So his contribution has taken many forms. He has done his constituency proud today and we thank him for it.

As we know, the loyal address was seconded by my hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Bow (Ms King). I echo entirely the Leader of the Opposition's words about her predecessor Peter Shore, whom I knew for many years as well. Even if I did not always agree with him—on some issues I strongly disagreed with him—he was someone of genuine integrity. He commanded the immense respect of all people, whether his political opponents or political friends.

I thought that the speech from my hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Bow was marvellous. What she said about housing in her constituency and about the work that she did in relation to genocide is absolutely right. We wish that she had identified the Conservative Whip. She did not, but I hope that she will identify him at least to the Leader of the Opposition, because that could be immensely useful.

My hon. Friend also mentioned the education results in her constituency and local borough. They have improved dramatically, including a 7 per cent. increase in GCSEs. That is a tremendous tribute to the teachers, pupils and parents in the schools in her constituency. She made a marvellous speech that was witty and also contained serious points. She came into the House as one of the youngest Members of Parliament and it is clear that she has a long and successful political career ahead of her. [HON. MEMBERS: "Ah."] However, how and when it will be successful I cannot say.

I hope that the House will forgive me if before I respond to the Leader of the Opposition's speech directly I say something about the firefighters' dispute, which he mentioned. I am sorry that the leadership of the Fire Brigades Union has chosen confrontation. The firefighters have been offered 11 per cent. over two years. That is more than nurses, teachers and police officers—much more. All that is asked in return is the modernisation of plainly outdated practices.

The offer came out of the independent review by George Bain, the man who headed the commission that introduced the minimum wage and who sat with two others, one from local government and the other last year's president of the TUC and himself a trade union leader. The idea that such a review was biased in some way is, therefore, palpably absurd. It was an entirely persuasive and reasonable report that I commend to people to read.

All of us in this House I hope pay tribute to the hard and sometimes dangerous work that firefighters do, but with inflation at around 2 per cent., no Government could yield to a wage claim of 40 per cent. with the insistence that it is unlinked to any change in working practices. It is not just this Government who could not contemplate doing so: no Government on earth could yield to such a claim. If we said yes to 40 per cent. for firefighters, how could we, or any Government, say no to a 40 per cent. claim for teachers, nurses or police officers? If we said yes to all, the consequence is so clear that it hardly bears spelling out. After all the hard work to get low inflation, low unemployment and low mortgage rates—in each case, the lowest for decades—and to stabilise the economy, we would simply wreck it and take this country back to days that I believe we all hope have gone for ever.

No Government—and certainly not this Government—want a confrontation. We especially do not want one at this time. The suggestion that amidst the current security issues the Government have tried to engineer this strike is offensive and wrong. On the contrary, we have tried our utmost to be as reasonable and as generous as possible, within the limits of what is possible.

Even now, I hope that common sense will prevail after this 48-hour stoppage. We have been in discussion with the union about emergency cover in the event of a major incident, which is obviously important. Meanwhile, we will continue to make all preparations to minimise risk to the public in so far as we can do so, guided by the best professional advice of our armed forces. I know that my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister wishes to make a statement on that tomorrow, with your permission, Mr. Speaker.

I welcome the right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr. Duncan Smith) to his first Queen's Speech debate as Leader of the Opposition. It has been a busy few days for him, and we are here to help. We know that he is on "Desert Island Discs" next week, so I thought that we could help with one or two choices of music. For example, everyone could choose a Beatles song—[HON. MEMBERS: "Help!"] My hon. Friends are unkindly suggesting "Help!". I do not know whether the right hon. Gentleman's hon. Friends have any messages for him, but perhaps they would suggest "Hello, Goodbye"—"You say hello, and we say goodbye." To celebrate his political roots, what about, "I Can't Let Maggie Go"? To mark his contribution to the last Conservative Government, he could perhaps

[Mr. Tony Blair]

choose "Rebel, Rebel". To commemorate his year as Conservative leader, I think "The Sound of Silence" has the right ring to it.

The other thing about "Desert Island Discs", which is where we can really help, is that the right hon. Gentleman gets to choose a book, and I have the perfect volume for him. It is a work published by Common Courage Press, its title is, indeed, "Unite or Die" and its author is one Fidel Castro. *[Interruption.]* The right hon. Gentleman is absolutely right—that is the very point that I was going to make. He is shouting out, "He's still there," and he is. Yes, 42 years is what hon. Members have to look forward to with the right hon. Gentleman.

I have not always studied the Conservative party website with assiduity, but I have studied it for today. It shows that the right hon. Gentleman, at any rate, is carrying on unabashed:

"The self-styled 'quiet man' of politics is following up his party's successful Bournemouth conference with a pledge to meet and listen to people . . . Mr Duncan Smith said he was prepared to return again and again to impoverished localities. He said, 'I can't just revisit once and expect people to turn round and say "Thank God you're back",'.

I have some good news for him. A *News of the World* opinion poll on potential Conservative leaders was published a few days ago: the bad news is that he is behind the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke), but the good news is that he is three points ahead of Basil Brush, so there is hope for him yet.

The truth about the position of the Conservative party is that its problem is not disunity, but what it unites around. It is policy that is the problem, because the right hon. Gentleman stood up at that Dispatch Box and effectively repeated the Conservative position of opposing investment in the national health service and in schools. *[Interruption.]* Oh yes. He got up and attacked the increases that we are introducing in April. That is because he does not agree with putting the extra investment into the health service.

Yesterday, the Conservative party made it clear that it is opposed not merely to the extra spending on schools, hospitals and the police—all the extra money that we are putting in. It also said that it would scrap the sure start programme, which has brought hope to people in communities up and down this country.

Sir Peter Tapsell (Louth and Horncastle): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Do you recall ruling in the last Session that the Prime Minister should address his remarks to the subject under debate, not to Conservative policy?

Mr. Speaker: That is only at Prime Minister's Question Time.

The Prime Minister: I sympathise with the hon. Gentleman—I know that he does not want us to talk about the Conservative party—but it is important in this Queen's Speech debate to state the difference between the two parties.

The truth is that the right hon. Gentleman is opposed to the investment and he, alone among Conservative leaders in Europe, is opposed to the Nice treaty on enlargement in Europe. He is opposed to the single currency on any terms, at any time. The Conservatives put a three-line whip on opposing adoption by unmarried couples. Where they should be moderate, they are extreme, but where they should be tough, they are soft. They will oppose, apparently, the Government's new law and order proposals. They have opposed many of the proposals on the seizure of assets of drug dealers. They are opposing the tightening of rules on evidence, previous convictions and cracking down on abuse in Crown court trials. They even opposed the fixed penalty notices for antisocial behaviour.

Where people need investment in public services, the Conservatives are opposed to it. Where business needs a sensible attitude in Europe, they would leave Britain marginalised. Where people want us to get tough on antisocial behaviour, they tell us it does not matter. That, with respect, is their problem. Out of touch and backward. Not so much nasty or nice. Just plainly and simply irrelevant.

The Queen's Speech focuses on economic stability, the invest and reform programme in public services, strong civic society based on rights and responsibilities and Britain engaged in the world. Now the right hon. Gentleman mentioned the previous crime Bills. Let me first point out that crime under this Government is down; under the Conservatives, it doubled. *[Interruption.]* Oh yes. If people look, for example today, at the latest figures issued by the Metropolitan police, in the last year in London, it has managed to cut street crime—not have street crime go up, as the right hon. Gentleman indicated.

The previous Bills were important. There was, for example, the Bill to introduce the crime and disorder partnerships in 1998, supported by the police and by local people. There were measures to do with licensing the private security industry. There were measures to do with terrorism—in particular, anti-terrorist legislation post-Omagh and post-11 September.

This criminal justice Bill sets out to rebalance the system in favour of the victim. It arises from the Auld review of two years ago and this year's White Paper. It will set up a strategy to modernise the entire criminal justice system from end to end—from better detection to effective sentencing, and right through to the rehabilitation of offenders. It will make fundamental changes to pre-trial processes, including reforms to police and criminal evidence, bail, charging and disclosure. It will change criminal trial processes by making changes to rules of evidence, double jeopardy, juries and appeals. It will put sense into sentencing through comprehensive reform of the sentencing framework, and will introduce provisions to address drug-related and juvenile offending. It will also improve the treatment of victims and witnesses.

I might have hoped that such a Bill would be supported by the Conservative party, because it will be supported by people in the country. It will be backed by the courts Bill, which, at long last, will unify court administration and modernise court practice. We will also deal with antisocial behaviour.

Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): Throughout the House and in the country, many people

will support effective measures to deal with crime and antisocial behaviour: that cannot be a matter of disagreement.

The Government rightly want to change sentencing policy, ensuring that time in custody is followed by supervision. Can the Prime Minister tell us whether that good idea has now received the support of his friend the Chancellor, so that when we have passed the Bill money will be available, in the current Parliament, to ensure that it is implemented immediately, rather than promised immediately but not delivered until much later?

The Prime Minister: We do indeed have money set aside to implement the provision. That is the purpose of the settlement given to the Home Office in the spending review.

I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman speaks for the Liberal Democrats when he says that most Members will support the measures on antisocial behaviour, but I hope that they will support those measures, because they are essential. After all, we are putting a huge investment into communities up and down the country, with the new deal for the unemployed, the new deal for the communities themselves, the working families tax credit, sure start, and record rises in child benefit. I think that, given the opportunities we are providing, we are entitled to demand responsibility in return. I think we are entitled to say that the things that make people's lives a misery—graffiti, vandalism, aggressive behaviour, fly tipping, abandoned cars, antisocial tenants, truancy and irresponsible use of airguns—should be dealt with comprehensively, and that a simple system of penalties should be introduced.

Mr. Chris Pond (Gravesham): My constituents and I will certainly welcome the list of measures to deal with antisocial behaviour, but my constituents are also concerned about another aspect of crime and antisocial behaviour. I heard nothing about domestic violence in the Queen's Speech, and I hope that it is not slipping off the Government's agenda.

The Prime Minister: A consultation paper on domestic violence will be published within the next few months. My hon. Friend is entirely right: domestic violence is a huge problem that affects many thousands of people in this country, causing them great misery.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): I appreciate the commitment to dealing with antisocial behaviour, but will the Prime Minister give an undertaking that the laws will be extended to Northern Ireland? People there want them as well, particularly to deal with the so-called joy riding and the car thieving that have led to so many deaths. Would it not be easier to include such measures in the new legislation than again to trifle with police reforms that were never in the Belfast agreement?

The Prime Minister: We are considering how to ensure that the antisocial behaviour provisions are available in Northern Ireland as well. I think they will be very important to the hon. Gentleman's constituents.

As for some of the measures introduced so far, it is simply incorrect to say that antisocial behaviour orders have not worked; but it is true to say that cumbersome procedures are needed to secure them. That is the precise reason for streamlining. It is also the reason for introducing the fixed-penalty notices that we now want to increase. We want to extend them to a wider range of offences, and to give more people power to implement them.

What that will do is critical. If we talk to any police officer dealing with antisocial behaviour, we hear that the problem is the length of time it takes to go through the court procedures. The fixed-penalty notice gives the police a simple thing to do. It is then up to the person who is, effectively, the defendant to come to court and have the notice set aside.

Jonathan Shaw (Chatham and Aylesford): I welcome what my right hon. Friend has said in relation to air weapons. Thousands of people up and down the country have been victims of air weapons, or have family who have been victims. Can he give an indication of when the legislation will come forward? Will it be a priority within the timetable?

The Prime Minister: It certainly will be a priority. We will bring it forward as soon as we possibly can.

As well as measures to change the criminal justice system and the courts system and to deal with antisocial behaviour, we will carry on with the programme of invest and reform. The right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green says, effectively, that all the changes and all the money that has been put into the health service and education have not worked, that nothing has happened, that nothing has changed. The Conservatives have to say that. They have to say that the national health service has failed because they do not want it to succeed. They have to say that our schools system cannot get better because they do not believe that improving our schools system is a priority for the Government.

Take any constituency and look at what changes have occurred, even the right hon. Gentleman's constituency. This year, his primary care trust has had an 8.9 per cent. increase in cash terms. He says that it has been wasted but let me tell him what it has bought: a 25 per cent. reduction in in-patient waiting lists from March 1997; a reduction in the total number of out-patient waiters of almost 50 per cent; the achievement of a maximum waiting time of 26 weeks for the first out-patient appointment; over £1 million to modernise accident and emergency. On education, there has been an increase of almost 20 per cent. in funding per pupil. The primary school results, GCSE results and A-level results are the best that his constituency has ever had. That is why the money is important for our public services. That is why it would be so wrong to take that money out.

David Burnside (South Antrim): The Prime Minister will recognise that Northern Ireland's secondary schools have a higher standard of academic results than any other part of the United Kingdom. Will he give the House a commitment that he will not follow up the decision by the Minister of Education, Martin McGuinness, in abolishing selection procedure and destroying the grammar school system in Northern Ireland?

The Prime Minister: I am sure that my right hon. Friend with the relevant responsibilities will have heard

[The Prime Minister:]

the hon. Gentleman's submission. I am aware that it is a controversial issue in Northern Ireland. Perhaps I will let my right hon. Friend get back to the hon. Gentleman with the detail of it.

In relation to health and education, let us be clear. Of course there is still an immense amount of progress to be made but the money has made an immense difference to constituencies up and down this country. Go into any school and see the capital investment there. Look at the extra number of nurses—tens of thousands extra. Look at the extra number of teachers. The right hon. Gentleman went on about teacher vacancies. Actually, he was wrong in what he said; but there are 20,000 more teachers today than there were five years ago and there are 80,000 more classroom assistants.

Does that solve the problem? No, but it is better than the situation where funding per pupil was getting cut in our schools, and where we had a 400,000 increase in the number on the waiting lists in the national health service. As a result of what we are trying to do now, we have the chance for the first time in a generation to get the reforms through in our public services that we need, backed by substantial extra investment.

Whatever the problems in the Conservative party, the Conservatives' real problem is that when it came to the test of whether they were really going to change, when it came to the test of whether they were prepared to back the investment in our public services, they voted against that investment.

Mr. Steve Webb (Northavon): Every day, the company pension rights of British workers are getting worse. All we are promised by the Government is another Green Paper and more delay. Does the Prime Minister think that there will be any decent pension schemes left by the time he legislates?

The Prime Minister: It is not correct to say that we have done nothing in relation to pensions and pensioners. A massive amount of money has been put into helping the poorest pensioners. We have the pension credit. There is the state second pension and the stakeholder pension. The purpose of the Green Paper is to try to simplify the system. It will be extremely important that we take the long-term decisions necessary in relation to pensions but we are only going to get to be able to do that on the basis of what works, which is why we set up the two reviews under Mr. Sandler and Mr. Pickering, and we will implement the recommendations that they have made.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): Does the commitment in the Queen's Speech to high levels of employment extend to the fishing communities around our coastline? The Prime Minister will know from his own recent experience that if the French fishing industry were facing mortal threat, President Chirac would be personally involved in defending it. What personal initiative can the Prime Minister offer to fishing communities in their time of need?

The Prime Minister: First, unemployment in this country is far lower than in France. The best protection that we can give to people is to create jobs in the economy. Secondly, it is a cruel deception to pretend to people in the fishing industry that there is some easy solution to the problems that they face. We have said that we will sit down with the industry, in light of the decisions of the European Council, and try to work out what we do if we have to decommission ships and if people are laid off to make sure that those people are properly looked after and protected. We will do everything we can to do that, but to try to say that there is some easy solution that will prevent any job losses in the fishing industry is not being honest with those in the fishing industry.

Mr. John Butterfill (Bournemouth, West): The Prime Minister said that he was concerned about hospital waiting lists. Is he aware that 40 beds are blocked at any given time at the Royal Bournemouth hospital as a direct result of the cuts of £3 million a year that he has made to the social services budget, which means that there are no places in nursing homes? How does he reconcile that with his ambition to reduce waiting lists?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman is making a very good point, which I shall answer. We have a Bill—his party is opposing it, incidentally—precisely to make sure that we deal with the issue of delayed discharges and bed blocking. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will support it. I do not know the exact position in his constituency, of course. However, if he is saying that his constituency needs more money than we have provided—I am sure that a real increase was provided—how on earth can he support the position of those on his party's Front Bench, which is to oppose even the money that we have put into the NHS?

What is more, the Conservatives are opposed not only to the money, but to the reform. Effectively, they are saying that they want to scrap all targets, which they attack all the time. I make no apology for saying that if we are putting extra money into the NHS, we want to see reductions in waiting lists and waiting times, because that is important for people who use the service.

The reason why the Conservatives must oppose the reform is that their reform proposal, in so far as there is one, is not about improving the health service or state schools. As came across clearly in the response of the Leader of the Opposition to an intervention, they want to provide a subsidy for people to go outside the NHS.

Mr. Duncan Smith: They are doing that now.

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman says that they are doing that. Fine; we have had an admission that that is his policy. Let me spell out to his right hon. and hon. Friends the consequences of that policy. His policy would mean that we had to take £1.5 billion out of the current NHS budget, with that money going to a tiny percentage of the overall NHS clientele. How would a pensioner who does not have much income afford to pay the money in order to get the subsidy? When the right hon. Gentleman talks about giving people a subsidy to go outside the state education system, how will taking that money, by way of subsidy, out of the state education system improve the quality of education for the millions of children who depend on state education in this country?

That is why the choices could not be more stark. The choice could not be more stark on crime, where the Conservative party has now got itself into a position where it is opposing the measures that we are taking on crime and antisocial behaviour; on the investment programme, where we want the investment to go in and the Conservatives want to take it out; and on reform, where we are trying to reform the public services as public services and they are trying to make sure that the public services stop being for the public at all.

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): When will we see the introduction of NHS dentistry into Market Harborough?

The Prime Minister: The hon. and learned Gentleman is absolutely right that that is a problem. That is why we have created a system in which people can get to an NHS dentist—*[Interruption.]* If the hon. and learned Gentleman gives me chapter and verse on the cases, I will have them looked into. However, when we came to power, the previous Government had wrecked NHS dentistry in this country. The idea that the Conservative party, with its record on the national health service and dentists, can turn round and tell us that we are the ones responsible for that situation! We are the ones trying to put it right, by investment and reform, and the Conservatives are opposing it.

It is not merely a question of the Conservatives having opposed the investment, having opposed the reform and opposing the criminal justice and antisocial behaviour measures: the Conservatives also have no coherent policy whatever for the economy. We have delivered in this country low inflation, low interest rates and low unemployment; we are now making a major investment in science and technology. The communications Bill announced in the Queen's Speech will free up the market in communications and the planning Bill will simplify procedures, but all these things would be put at risk if we returned to the disastrous policies that, under the last Conservative Government, gave us interest rates of 15 per cent., interest rates of 10 per cent. for years or more, and 3 million unemployed. *[Interruption.]* The Conservatives say that they have heard it all before, and I can tell them that they will hear it all again from now until election time.

On the issues of foreign policy, the Leader of the Opposition and I of course agree on the need to go through the United Nations and disarm Iraq of weapons of mass destruction, but I hope that, as one part of any changes that the right hon. Gentleman is looking at in the Conservative party, he will change its disastrous policy towards the European Union. There is no way that this country can be a leading player in the European Union unless it has a constructive and engaged policy. It means of course that we have to stick up for British interests, but British interests are about being inside the European Union, not being on the outside.

At every level in this Queen's Speech, whether it is on the economy or in relation to Europe—

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Before the Prime Minister leaves foreign policy, will he answer this question? No one doubts his genuine concern with the continent of Africa, but would he reflect as to whether there is something rather grotesque about the fact that we have the situation in Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa, and in southern Africa, and the starvation, while the west—ourselves and the Americans—are proposing to launch an attack that will end up heaven knows how in the middle east? Would it not be wise at least to reflect on the consequences of the two rather different approaches, because there are many people in the world who do not think that the west is being very wise about this?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend put his question in a very reasonable way and I pay tribute to the sincerity of his views because he disagrees profoundly with what we are doing in relation to Iraq, but I would say to him that the simple answer is that we should do both things. We should be ensuring that, through the United Nations, Iraq is disarmed of weapons of mass destruction, but we should also be carrying on the policies that the Labour Government have pioneered on aid and development and on third world debt, to help people in Africa. The reason why it is so important to get action in Africa, and the reason why we have been leading on the issue of the New Partnership for Africa's Development, is precisely to achieve the combination of measures against conflict and measures for better aid and development, so that the issues that have arisen in Ethiopia and southern Africa do not recur.

The truth is that on each of these major issues there is a fundamental difference between the two political parties: fundamental on the issue of the economy, fundamental on the issue of Europe, fundamental on the issue of investment for public services, fundamental on the issues to do with reform of public services and fundamental in relation to crime and law and order and antisocial behaviour. *[Interruption.]* I am glad that the Leader of the Opposition can count.

However, it is important to realise that the reason why the right hon. Gentleman has taken his party to the position that it is in, is that in each of those cases, he has made the wrong choice. That is the real reason why, with respect to the right hon. Gentleman, he has the problem that he has. This country knows that we need a stable economy and low unemployment, not a return to boom and bust. People know that we need investment in our public services rather than cuts. They know that we need reform of our public services not the privatisation of them. They know that we need the tough measures on crime and antisocial behaviour and they know that this country's future in the end, whatever difficulties and doubts they have about Europe, lies at the heart of Europe and not on the outside of Europe. It is for that reason that the Queen's Speech continues that programme of the Government, continues the programme on the economy, on our public services, on a strong civic society, and on a foreign policy that allows us to play our part in Europe properly, and it is for these reasons also that the Conservative party, as it has shown once again today, has made the wrong decisions for the country and as a result will remain out of office for a very long time.

4.4 pm

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Skye and Inverness, West): First, may I begin by joining in the appropriate tributes that have been paid to the late Jamie Cann and

[Mr. Charles Kennedy]

Sir Ray Powell, both of whom were respected in all quarters of the House? On behalf of Liberal Democrats, I pass on our best wishes to their families, relatives and loved ones.

Secondly, it is my very pleasant task to join in the congratulations of the right hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes). I do not have to practise too hard to say his constituency name. As someone said to me on a television programme, when I mentioned the title of my constituency, it sounds like a firm of accountants. We have that feature in common.

On the serious side, I very much agree with the right hon. Gentleman in welcoming the emphasis on increased foreign aid and international obligation in the Queen's Speech. I pay tribute to his long-standing work, as a Minister and in opposition, over many years, through the 1980s in particular, in that field. I think I am right that, such was his global track record in opposition, as a member of the Defence and Foreign Affairs Committees, that the late Donald Dewar remarked percipiently that if he ever found himself, as he frequently did—as the press recorded on many occasions—in a global trouble spot, whether it was a military coup or a civil war, it was always possible to find him, as he would be in the radio station, broadcasting to the rest of the world about what was happening.

I remember that, in my first Parliament, just as we entered the summer recess of 1983, *The Guardian* decided to run a competition for its readership. The prize was a bottle of champagne for the first sharp-eyed reader who could spot the first Member of Parliament to demand the recall of Parliament. The next day's edition carried a clarification saying that the competition was now suspended, because a sharp-eyed reader had written in to say that, the day before, the right hon. Gentleman had already demanded a recall of Parliament. He was never one to miss a trick.

The right hon. Gentleman has been at his most persuasive this afternoon. I only regret that I have never been able to persuade him of the merits of proportional representation. In that respect, he is unlike the much more enlightened hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Bow (Ms King). In the past, she and I have worked together on electoral reform issues through the Make Votes Count campaign. I wish her every success in her chairmanship within her party of the ongoing campaign for electoral reform. I hope that, like me, she will not miss the opportunity, which will occur during this Session, to remind the Prime Minister of the commitment in the last Labour general election manifesto to review all voting systems after next year's May local elections. If he is not susceptible to my persuasive charms, I hope that he will be susceptible to hers.

Over the years, the hon. Lady has also impressed many of us—in the best sense—with her independence of mind and spirit on issues as wide-ranging as Afghanistan and asylum. I suspect that she subscribes to Thomas Jefferson's view of life that a little rebellion now and then is no bad thing—I do not expect the leader of the Conservative party to be saying that in his sleep at the moment—and I wonder whether aspects of the Queen's Speech might encourage her in that direction. I look forward to that in the coming months.

In many ways, the Queen's Speech defines what are the new fault lines of British politics in the 21st century. The old, more sterile and outdated arguments about left versus right—the arguments across the Dispatch Box between the two other party leaders make this point—are increasingly being supplanted by arguments between those who pursue a liberal approach and those who pursue an illiberal approach.

Much of the Queen's Speech is sensible, but in its measures on law and order and on crime and punishment, there is also much that is too illiberal. It is clear from the general stance of the Conservative party that a properly effective Opposition, who take a critical approach to the Government's measures, is more likely to come from those who are instinctively liberal and democratic in their approach. That is the case in both this House and the House of Lords, as we saw up to and including last week with the progress made on the last Session's legislation and the changes that we made to it.

I am surprised about one of the Conservative party's choices in respect of the Queen's Speech. Many people watching from outside will not know how our procedures work. We are in the process of modernising, and the Liberal Democrats have given full support to the efforts of the Leader of the House on that. However, there is one aspect of the Queen's Speech that I should like modernised. As things stand, the Conservative party decides the themes for each day of the Queen's Speech debate. I am sure people outside the House will join me in finding it unbelievable, given the long shadow that the international situation is casting in the Chamber and across the country, that the Conservative party has not allocated a day to discuss defence and foreign policy.

One can only speculate why. On Iraq, as we saw during the parliamentary recall, the leader of the Conservative party has positioned himself so close to the American Administration—it is not simply a matter of being close to the British Government—that he does not have the valid questions to ask which need to be articulated. I find it even more incredible that when the chairman of the Conservative party was asked by an interviewer at lunchtime today why it had not allocated a day to discuss foreign affairs and defence, which is in its gift to do, she said that the party wanted to concentrate the focus of its discussions and attack over the coming week on the public services.

How interesting! Let us consider the big initiative on the new Conservative approach to the public services launched by the leader of the Conservative party, who made his name in the House as a principled and consistent Maastricht rebel. On taking up his position, he asked his Front-Bench spokespeople to go around the rest of the European Union to find out why Europe delivers better public services than the Tories managed to provide in 18 years in power. Surely the benefits that he now believes can flow from the continental experience, as reflected in the Conservative's reformed approach to the public services, mitigate all the more the decision to have a day's debate that focuses on matters European and further afield. It says it all that the quiet

man approach to the domestic and international agendas is increasingly becoming the silent man approach.

We welcome the fact that the Government again rightly pay tribute to European enlargement remaining the big goal, a view that we share. However, as we did in exchanges a couple of weeks ago after the last summit, we have to enter the reservation—I think the Prime Minister, the Foreign Secretary and the Chancellor would agree—that despite the agreement, which goes up to 2006, Europe will have to revisit the common agricultural policy if it is serious about making a success of enlargement. We hear nothing positive from the Conservatives on that because they have nothing to contribute. I say in passing that when agricultural matters are considered, it is important that the Prime Minister, with an eye to the many fragile communities around our coastline and country, puts maximum political support behind the plight of the fishing communities, which face an uncertain future.

On Iraq, there may be an opportunity for a fuller debate beyond the Queen's Speech, but clearly the progress that has been made in influencing the American Administration to recognise the legitimacy of the United Nations is welcome. We hope to see the readmission of the weapons inspectorate and a sensible, authoritative international analysis of the situation regarding weapons of mass destruction.

The American Administration, having been so dismissive of the UN and having become much more realistic and responsible in their attitude to it, must surely realise that if the weapons inspectors enjoy unfettered access according to a clear timetable, as we believe they should, and return with qualitative information based on that, the moral mandate must rest with the UN. We must not allow the situation to slip in favour of the more hawkish elements in and around the Bush Administration who in their hearts, many of us suspect, would still prefer to take a unilateralist approach with Britain tagging along, if possible, rather than maintaining the international coalition of interest against terrorism which has been such a successful feature since 11 September last year.

Mr. Dalyell: I find these elements of behaviour of the hawks rather surprising because, after all, it was Mr. Rumsfeld who went to Iraq to negotiate on behalf of his firm and on oil interests in 1983, and it was Mr. Cheney whose firm, Halliburton, had the most intimate connections with Iraq as late as 1994. Is it not a bit strange?

Mr. Kennedy: The hon. Gentleman, as Father of the House, is something of a parliamentary deity, but I read with considerable interest a recent article in *The Daily Telegraph* by the incoming Archbishop of Canterbury which touched on some of these matters. There is a growing perception at a senior level in different walks of life that some of the decisions being made and some of the attitudes being espoused cannot be divorced from some of the economic and business background of recent decades.

I turn, finally, to immediate issues. The Prime Minister's remarks about the firefighters' dispute were correct, and the leadership of the Fire Brigades Union must recognise that it should have contributed properly to the Bain inquiry. My hon. Friend the Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey), within whose constituency the FBU national headquarters is located, made a submission to the inquiry on behalf of our party.

We certainly share the view that there has to be restructuring, and that it can accompany the additional salary increases that are on the table. The Chancellor should be willing to recognise his obligation to help local authorities to make that package possible. The Government have slightly hidden behind the argument that there are savings to be achieved in the provision of a fire service, and that those could somehow be transferred to assist in the payment of additional salaries. That is not so, at least in the short term, because some of the savings will accrue several years further on, as is so often the way with restructuring. It will cost more in the short term to save more in the longer term, and the Government must recognise that.

My final reflection on the matter concerns the Conservatives' contribution. The leader of the party returned to the issue about which he was asking the Prime Minister a couple of weeks ago, but on BBC television last night one of his shadow Cabinet colleagues, who speaks for the party on defence, said, of what is already a difficult situation:

"You almost wonder whether the firefighters' union is being paid by Saddam Hussein."

How immature and how inflammatory. I hope that the leader of the Conservative party will distance himself from such discussion.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): While we are talking about inflammatory and infantile contributions, does the right hon. Gentleman care to retract his remark at the Liberal Democrat party conference, when he said, regarding what America has had to face over the past year, that there is more than a hint of imperialism in America's actions in respect of Iraq? Does he stand by that, or does he withdraw it?

Mr. Kennedy: I certainly did say that there was more than a hint of imperialism, because my speech was delivered the day after Mr. Rumsfeld made a speech in which he referred to the "decapitation" of Iraq. Perhaps the hon. Gentleman thinks that that is the sort of language that the US Defence Secretary should be using in such a dangerous situation, but some of us involved in politics in this country believe that we are right to point out the dangers of that approach.

Moving on to the other details of the Queen's Speech, it is welcome that there is to be more pre-legislative scrutiny. All would agree that that has worked well in the Scottish Parliament. We will examine aspects of housing policy, management of nuclear liabilities and the laws on corruption. Pre-legislative scrutiny is a good innovation, and we would like to see more of it.

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham): Does the leader of the Liberal Democrats think that the Government propose to spend enough on health and education to deliver high-quality services, or does he recommend more spending and higher taxes?

Mr. Kennedy: First, we voted with the Government for the extra expenditure that will now be made.

[Mr. Kennedy]

That fundamentally distinguishes our position from that of the Conservatives, because they voted against that extra investment. I assure the right hon. Gentleman that we will remind the public of that at hourly intervals between now and any future elections.

Secondly, having supported that investment, we have advanced specific arguments in respect of health expenditure. In addition to the investment that has been announced, welcome though it is, we want greater decentralisation—in both health and education—than the Government are proposing in the Queen's Speech, because we think that the money could be more efficiently deployed. On health in particular, at our conference this autumn we proposed that national insurance contributions should be earmarked specifically for the health service—our argument in favour of that being that, unlike the short, time-limited commitment that the Chancellor is able to give, national insurance contributions go on year after year and could provide a rolling fund for ongoing additional health service investment.

I am grateful to the hon. Member for New Forest, East (Dr. Lewis) and the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) for their interest. In their constituencies, the Liberal Democrats need a swing of less than 5 and 7 per cent. respectively to win the seat at the next election.

David Cairns (Greenock and Inverclyde): On the issue of funding for public services, will the right hon. Gentleman clarify his party's position? The Liberal Democrats, as part of the Scottish Executive, have approved a public-private partnership private finance initiative bid from Inverclyde council for £80 million to improve our schools, yet the Liberal Democrats on Inverclyde council have opposed the bid and said that they will not take the money in any circumstances. Will he say which bit of Liberal Democrat policy he supports—the policy in Edinburgh, or the policy in Greenock—lest he leave the impression that his party has two wholly different policies on the same issue?

Mr. Kennedy: All I can say to the hon. Gentleman—and I think that the Prime Minister will support me on this—is, welcome to the devolution politics of Britain today. The Labour party and its leader find themselves defending one Labour policy on university funding in Scotland and a different policy in England and Wales. That is the truth of the matter.

The hon. Gentleman should talk with Jim Wallace, the Liberal Democrat Deputy First Minister in the coalition Administration in Edinburgh, and with the Scottish Trades Union Congress, whose representatives say that they find the general Liberal Democrat approach to the private finance initiative more sympathetic to their concerns than the approach for which the Labour party has been arguing. That, too, is the truth of the matter. He should talk to the STUC—he might find it educational.

Mr. Salmond: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Kennedy: Ah, Alex!

Mr. Salmond: He might not say that afterwards.

Never mind the PFI—can the right hon. Gentleman explain why Mr. Jim Wallace was in favour of a full-scale privatisation of the prison service in Scotland, and even now proposes an extension of privatisation, while his colleagues here argue that there has been over-privatisation south of the border?

Mr. Kennedy: I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman, a former Member of the Scottish Parliament and leader of the Scottish National party who curiously decided to stay at Westminster rather than Edinburgh does not understand the way in which the Scottish Parliament works. Unlike at Westminster, consultation means something there. When the Executive consult and Parliament has a vote, lo and behold, Ministers must pay attention. Would that not be a novel approach here? The hon. Gentleman's facts are therefore simply wrong.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham) *rose—*

Mr. Kennedy: I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman in a moment. I cannot let down someone who has displayed such magnificent adherence to principle recently.

Despite the draft legislation introduced in June, the absence of a mental health Bill is a serious omission. The Government are culpable, because it is their fault that the Green Paper and the draft legislation introduced after consultation angered many professionals and people involved in patient rights, not least in the community. That is a pity because, while we would have opposed many of the measures in such a Bill, there was all-party agreement on many other good components, which have been lost. I therefore hope that in this Session the Government listen more carefully. If they had done so during consultation, we would have a Bill with broad-based all-party support and progress would have been made.

Mr. Bercow: Advances in medical science on the one hand, and the inevitable limits on the availability of public resources on the other, mean that whenever we create a new cure in this country we also create a new queue. Would the right hon. Gentleman say something more about the precise structural reform of the national health service that would enable his party more effectively to translate care from a word into a deed?

Mr. Kennedy: My hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris) will have more time at his disposal than I have this afternoon to deal with that. However, having listened to the hon. Gentleman's contributions on the issue over the years, I believe that he shares our view that there must be a fundamental shift in political management and aspirations for health care. We must move from crisis intervention to prevention and promotion. That is a difficult political hurdle to overcome, because the easier debate is the one about statistics. We again had a sense of "Groundhog Day" in the Queen's Speech. The Government preferred another reform Bill to targeting something in a more sustained way.

On the changes to broadcasting and communications policy—incidentally, it was interesting to hear how the Conservative Front Bench phrased the issue—it is

important to get the new regulatory framework in place before fast and loose decisions are possibly taken about television ownership, monopoly provision and who has the right of control. However, the Queen's Speech included at last a piece of environmental legislation, which has not been mentioned by Conservative or Labour Members so far. We welcome measures on extraction policy, the prevention of abuse and licences on water management. However, my hon. Friend the Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) is right that there is a significant omission regarding company pension policy. In addition, we expected a Bill from the Department of Trade and Industry on corporate responsibility and company reform, not least as the banking sector can easily be accused of manipulating the clearing system. There were high hopes that that would be something that the Government wanted to deal with, but unfortunately they have not done so. There is still too much centralisation in many of our public services, although we obviously we welcome one significant piece of decentralisation—the Bill to facilitate more regionalism, with elected authorities across England.

Finally, on the crime measures, in a joint statement earlier today after the Queen's Speech, the Bar Council, Liberty, Legal Action Group and the Criminal Bar Association described many of the measures as "misguided" and said that they could send more people to jail. They went on to make the central point that we will hear again and again in this House and in the House of Lords:

> "The idea that reducing the rights of defendants benefits the victims of crime is fundamentally flawed."

That is the fundamental issue of philosophical principle and policy distinction between ourselves and the Government on these matters. Making previous convictions available to a court is a trial of a person's past. What impact will double jeopardy have on juries, when they know that the Director of Public Prosecutions and the Court of Appeal have already sent a case back? That is bound to influence the way in which juries look at the issue. If the measure is allowed to be retrospective, it will be a potential Pandora's box, with profound consequences for the future administration of justice in this country.

We welcome the move to bring together magistrates and Crown courts, but we need more lay magistrates and more local courts. Over recent years there has been too much regression in that respect, which many of us have experienced at constituency and regional level.

Many of the antisocial behaviour measures strike one as gimmickry. Some have been tried out, but we have never seen the results of the pilot schemes published or heard what assessment was made. Some have never been tried out—they were not worth trying out, because they did not equate with common sense and were not worth pursuing. As regards young people and the kinds of issues that the Government are addressing—again, we all know this from our constituency experience—what is needed is not another full range of Bills in a Queen's Speech, but measures to redress the consequences of the closure and withdrawal of youth facilities at community level up and down the land. That is what will ameliorate the situation, rather than punitive measures which amount to applying a poop-scoop to a problem that is already out of control.

On domestic, European and wider foreign policy, there is a need for effective opposition in the coming Session. Parliamentary democracy requires it and the country needs it. The Liberal Democrats are determined and best situated to provided it.

4.32 pm

Mr. Kevin Barron (Rother Valley): I have been listening to the debate between those on the two Front Benches and the leader of the Liberal Democrats about the current situation in the firefighting industry and the likelihood of a strike beginning in a couple of hours. Many of us come into the House with some history and memories that stay with us throughout our lives, although we move on.

Thirty years ago, I was a coalminer working in the coal industry in south Yorkshire. Probably one of the most political events that I experienced was the strike in 1972, when we found ourselves working in an industry that was pretty bad in terms of the environment and that was about 19th in the industrial wages league. We went on strike for four or five weeks and returned victors. Our position in the industrial wages league moved up to about third place. Within two years, we were back on strike again, because every public sector union that settled with the then Government in 1972 settled for percentages as high as we had achieved, so back down the industrial wages league we went.

When we went on strike again in 1974, we became a special case. The trade union unit at Ruskin college—the college that I was to attend as a student a few years later—held an investigation into coalminers' wages at the time and settled the dispute. In retrospect, one of the benefits was that it cost the Conservative Government their time in office—the Labour party won the general election. More importantly, it was going on strike and being a special case that put the miners back up the industrial wages league, and no one followed in the way that they had between 1972 and 1974. The great pity of what has happened in Britain in the past few months is that the Fire Brigades Union did not take up the offer of a review to put forward its case about its terms and conditions and the reasons why believes it is a special case, if indeed it is. Given that its wage rates have remained unchanged for the past 25 years and how society has moved on, that might have been a better path. I had not intended to talk on that subject today, but I thought that I should say those few words.

I want to touch briefly on the subject of civic society and rights and responsibilities, with which the Prime Minister dealt today. We all have a right to employment, to have ambitions for our families, to security in old age, to good schools, to a good national health service, to good housing and to strong communities free of crime. Indeed, today the media have led on the measures in the Queen's Speech to combat crime and antisocial behaviour. Those are the rights that the Government rightly argue we should have. Our responsibility is to help to achieve those rights through what we do, what we earn through employment, what we contribute to our families and what our families contribute, what we contribute to our communities and to our country, and through our attitude to life in general, our behaviour and our values. Those are the responsibilities of everyone in society.

[Mr. Kevin Barron]

However, in many respects society is not equal. It is easy for us to say that those are the rights and responsibilities that we should have. Some of us can have those rights and responsibilities because we can afford them, but many others in society cannot. We should always remember that when we talk about rights and responsibilities in society.

In my constituency I have seen those rights grow during the past five and a half years of a Labour Government. Unemployment has been drastically reduced and poverty has been attacked not just by people having better benefits and more targeted benefits, but by measures such as the national minimum wage. They have given my constituents great rights—if that is the correct word to use—and there is no doubt that life for the vast majority of people has improved. However, it does not follow that there has been less antisocial behaviour and crime. No matter what the statistics say, people do not believe that there has been an improvement in that regard. We still have a long way to go. Nevertheless, the management of the economy has greatly assisted individuals.

I do not know whether any hon. Members here today were present at Prime Minister's questions last Wednesday, when the length of time that people have to wait to get on to detoxification or drug programmes, as they are now called, was debated, but about two and a half months ago I was telephoned by a single parent in my constituency who was in despair about her son, aged between 20 and 21 years of age, and she subsequently came to see me at my surgery where I had a long chat with her. Her son has been homeless for many years in Rotherham. He used to live with his mother but he stole to feed his drug habit and she effectively turfed him out because she could not have him living there any more. She is a single parent who works a 12-hour night shift in a food processing factory. Her son decided to seek treatment for his drug problem and he was told that he would have to wait between six and eight weeks before he could be put on a detox programme, a fact which I later confirmed.

I spoke to my constituent again this morning—*[Interruption.]* It appears that the electricity supply has gone, or at least some of it, but I will not worry; people have never been known to be unable to hear me when I am speaking. Two and a half months ago, her son was awaiting a court appearance, and she said at the time that she could not do anything to bring him back into her home because the old habit of crime and everything else would start up again. *[Interruption.]* It appears that we are now back on course.

The son has recently been back in prison for a few weeks, at Her Majesty's pleasure. I did not know that he was waiting to go back to the magistrates court, and in due course he was back in one of the local prisons. He came back out on Friday with a recommendation that he should participate in a drug programme. I spoke to his mother today, however, and he is still homeless in Rotherham as the programme was not ready for him.

On drug-related crime in my constituency, it is estimated that in South Yorkshire, and particularly in Rotherham, somebody who has a heroine or similar habit that needs to be fed has to steal about £75,000-worth of goods a year to feed a habit of £15,000—the approximate cost of a year's supply of street heroine in South Yorkshire. Yet people have to wait weeks and months for a chance to join a drugs programme. The young man to whom I referred came out of prison last Friday to find that he is homeless in Rotherham again as of today. He stayed with his mum for the first two days after his release, but he is now back with his friends in Rotherham. I have no doubt that old habits will soon be picked up again. If we do not start to attack those issues, we will never get rid of crime.

All of us are conditioned by the circumstances into which we are born. For many years, it was denied in the House that poverty led to crime or anything else. I remember well the debates that took place year after year, when my constituency had unemployment of 25 or 26 per cent., but people still said that that did not lead to crime and other problems. It clearly did so. Nobody would argue that there has been no clear evidence of that in the past five years. What breeds crime is the communities in which it occurs and their run-down state. It is all right talking about airguns and ensuring that people take individual responsibility; I agree, but five years on my constituency still has some of the most atrocious housing estates in the UK.

The Government have done a lot, and I am not for one minute attacking them. The local authority—the main body that can take control of such situations—is a bit handicapped in terms of resources. My constituency has a legacy of public sector housing that is not local authority housing. Most of it was established by the National Coal Board, and the homes were sold to individual tenants when they were working. Many of those tenants—not hundreds, but thousands—have now retired and cannot afford to do anything about the condition of the housing stock.

Jon Trickett (Hemsworth): I thank my right hon. Friend for giving way. I have the same problem. He and I represent coalfield communities in Yorkshire. Does he agree that the decision to privatise National Coal Board colliery houses was disastrous? Does he also agree that one of the main problems in such communities is the effect of private landlords not paying enough attention to the sort of tenants who have been located there?

Mr. Barron: That is exactly the problem. There are examples of local authorities taking action against bad tenants on such estates, as the Queen's Speech highlighted. I am pleased that they do that, but those people have to live somewhere. They cannot simply be moved round and round. A major problem in areas such as mine is the inheritance of housing stock, the vast majority of which is pre-war, that is no longer in public hands. It is not easy for individuals who have bought such houses to do anything about their repair. The alternative is, of course, private landlords. However, most of them want to put up rents and do little else to the properties.

We have the added problem of abandoned properties. People live in fear of an estate in my constituency. A house that becomes empty soon attracts vandals and people towards whom some of the words in the Queen's Speech are directed. People are scared to death that the houses will be set on fire. Members of the Fire Brigades Union are on one specific estate at least once a week to

put out fires in properties. If any of us lived next door to an empty property that was targeted by such antisocial behaviour, we would want more than Bills in Parliament to deal with the matter.

I often have to persuade people not to take the law into their own hands and ensure that they contact the police. Some have little faith that anything will happen if they do that. I do not blame South Yorkshire police. Major problems need to be tackled on estates that have the history of those in my constituency, and that have been systematically abandoned.

To the Government's credit, they set up some pilot schemes on abandoned estates two years ago. One in north Rotherham, not in my constituency, is up and running. However, we do not need pilot schemes; we know what is wrong. We need resources and the political direction to do something on the estates.

Another estate in my constituency is not as bad as others with regard to fire hazards and so on. A capital programme of approximately £900,000 has begun there to repair 29 homes that Rotherham borough council owns. Sadly, about 34 homes on the same estate are not owned by the council, and not a penny will be spent on them. I have argued with my council and written to Ministers about the matter. It is bad public investment to put thousands of pounds into council houses when neighbouring properties are abandoned or run down, and the people who live in them cannot afford repairs. We must tackle such matters quickly.

Community care delayed discharge is another important subject in the Queen's Speech. We all know about the national health service's problems, especially bed blocking. However, we must be careful when we consider the best way in which to discharge the responsibility of getting people out of hospital and into different forms of care as soon as possible. I stress to my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary that, for many years, Rotherham has had a good track record on social services such as looking after people in the community, especially elderly people.

It was therefore not difficult for Rotherham borough council and the local health service to work together on joint packages for good partnerships to enable social services and the primary care trust to work together more closely. Many services that are designed to prevent inappropriate admission to hospital and facilitate early discharge have been developed through the partnership approach. The partnerships made a good response to the consultation document, which was discussed in several partnership arenas in Rotherham. The resulting firm consensus was that a system of penalising local councils for circumstances that are frequently beyond their control would have a detrimental effect on current and future partnerships.

We are considering an important but fragile subject for legislation. We all accept that there is a possibility of jeopardising partnerships such as those in Rotherham if we get into a position whereby people blame one another for patients not being discharged. My local authority is especially worried about the penalties that a Bill may contain for cases when patients do not come out of hospital in the set time scales.

A safe and speedy hospital discharge depends on the availability of a range of community-based services and appropriately qualified and skilled staff to provide them. We know that there is a national shortage of qualified social work staff. We know that there is a national shortage of nurses. There is also a national shortage of therapists, who are important in providing care in the community. It is important that when the proposed legislation goes through the House—I am not making a bid to be a member of the Standing Committee—we get it right. The partnership with the health service, social services and Rotherham borough council should be replicated in many other parts of the country, if it has not been replicated already.

Mr. Clive Soley (Ealing, Acton and Shepherd's Bush): My right hon. Friend is making an important point that certainly affects Ealing and Hammersmith. Most of us would support ideas that move things forward, if necessary through financial penalty. It is crucial to ensure that a local authority has the facilities to make the necessary provision, and that includes places in homes. He is making an important point that the Government need to address.

Mr. Barron: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The Government should be aware that if they introduce a system that makes it impossible for discharge to take place within the time frame that has been referred to in consultations, and penalises people for situations not of their making, they will disrupt what has been working in Rotherham for a number of years. It seems that we would be going backwards and not forwards.

I am pleased once again to be involved in a Queen's Speech debate with a Labour Government in office. I am pleased also with the massive improvement that has been seen in my constituency over the years. We have agreed a private finance initiative of about £52 million to knock down schools that have been around since the turn of the last century and to replace them. I live about 500 yd from my old school and I look forward to it coming down and a new school being built on the site. Without a Labour Government, that would not have been possible. However, there is a long way to go before we can say that the breeding grounds of crime and antisocial behaviour have been removed. We must keep up the good work for many years to come.

4.52 pm

Rev. Ian Paisley (North Antrim): I associate myself and my colleagues with the remarks made about former Members of this place. I have been a Member for more than 30 years. I knew the two Members particularly well and I think that the tributes were well paid, and I think that all who knew them would like to pay their tributes—*[Interruption.]* When the right hon. Member for Ross, Skye and Inverness, West (Mr. Kennedy) left his place, I thought that he wanted me to give way to him. I do not think that I would have done so.

I shall mention the entertaining—if I might use the word—words of the proposer and seconder. I have heard many of these debates in my time, but I think that the contributions of the proposer and seconder on this occasion were extra special. I think of the background of both Members.

Unfortunately, as a representative for Northern Ireland, I have a sober picture to put to the House. Men who risked their lives during the entire terrorist

[Rev. Ian Paisley]

campaign—I refer to prison officers—are now engaged in a constant protest because documents concerning themselves, their wives, their families, the numbers of their cars and their associates are in the possession of IRA-Sinn Fein. They have been stolen from Government offices. Many of these men have not yet been informed of what documents the Government now have knowledge of that are in the possession of IRA-Sinn Fein. When a deputation from my party met the new Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, he had to admit that he was not a position as yet to give the deputation the number of documents involved because the full scale of this thievery from Government offices is not yet known.

Dr. Julian Lewis: The hon. Gentleman raises an important point and I wonder whether he can throw some light on a point that has puzzled me since the first break-in at Castlereagh. Surely sensitive documents should be cleared from desks and locked in safes, whether in police headquarters or a Minister's office. Then, even if those places were infiltrated, the documents would have been put away safely at the end of the day.

Rev. Ian Paisley: The people who had access to the offices were not properly vetted and were part of the spy ring. In an amazing development the night before last, the assistant Chief Constable for the new Police Service of Northern Ireland said that he wanted to announce that the police had cracked the greatest spy ring that had ever tried to gain intelligence in the United Kingdom. He told us the number of documents that had been stolen and then he made such an amazing statement that I nearly fell off my chair. He said that he had no evidence that the documents that had been stolen would ever be made use of in terrorist campaigns. That suggests to me that there is a plan afoot, on the part of the Government, to get IRA-Sinn Fein back to the table without dealing with the problem of their possession of arms.

The leader of the SDLP, Mr. Durkan, said at his annual general meeting and rally that the Prime Minister had asked him to join in removing IRA-Sinn Fein representatives from the Northern Ireland Executive, but that he would not agree to their removal. However, the Prime Minister has not said that he did not say that. The Prime Minister should know that the people of Northern Ireland believe what Mr. Durkan said. He was convinced that IRA-Sinn Fein were involved in that conspiracy.

The situation in Northern Ireland is serious. When the Prime Minister came to Northern Ireland he praised the integrity of Mr. Adams and Mr. McGuinness. I do not know why he did that. He spoke of some "malignant whisperers", but he could not have meant me, because I never whisper—as the House knows. When I spoke with the Prime Minister a few days ago, I said, "Don't tell me, Prime Minister, that you were not referring to the people who support me and who are opposed to any terrorist organisation, be it loyalist or IRA-Sinn Fein, being in office in any Government of Northern Ireland."

The assistant Chief Constable, Alan McQuillan said that the greatest spy ring ever had been broken. I would not like to say what that has cost the Government or how many people have been taken away from other security duties to take part in those operations. However, now we are told that we do not need to worry because there is no evidence that the information that is in the hands of terrorists will be used by them. Anybody who has come through the catastrophe of these last years will know exactly what the men involved were after and what they were doing. One need only enter the areas where they have mafia power and see what they do to their own co-religionists to know what they would do if they were let loose on the whole of Northern Ireland.

Today, we have had the Queen's Speech, but I wonder why it was not mentioned that the Northern Ireland Office has just announced that it has called a round-table conference next week—with Sinn Fein-IRA having a representative there—to discuss the situation, under the presidency of the new Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and the Foreign Secretary of the south of Ireland. So we shall have at the table those who are accused of this spying; some of their organisation's members are charged with it. We are to consider also the matter concerning Castlereagh, for Mr. McQuillan has made it clear—there is no doubt about it—that IRA-Sinn Fein were responsible for breaking into that police station and that papers have been issued to bring back from the United States of America a man who is wanted in respect of some of those cases.

Next week there will be a meeting which people can attend even if members of their organisation go to Colombia, although we were told that they went there on holiday. We were told by the leaders of the IRA that they did not even know those men, but now they all know them and the leaders of IRA-Sinn Fein have been out in Colombia to help them with their legal matters. How did they come to know those men so quickly? Do hon. Members go on holiday on forged passports? Is that how hon. Members take their holidays? It is dangerous enough travelling on our own passports, so travelling on a forged passport, as those men did, shows the extent of the matter. Car bombs similar to those that have gone off in Northern Ireland have started to go off in Colombia since the visit of those men.

So all these things are mounting up, yet those people are to be credibly accepted as negotiating partners again, despite all that background. Surely the time has come for them to be told. When the Prime Minister was in Belfast, he told them that they had to make a decision—I wonder what he is saying now—but today the Government have made a decision to bring those people back to the negotiating table.

My party will not be at that table, because we will not be sitting down with those who are responsible for what they have done. Nor will I associate myself with those who are putting the wives and families of the men who look after our prisons through terrible agony and trauma. Those women are demented. One has said, "My friend's husband has been told he is on the list. My husband has asked whether he is on the list, and the Northern Ireland Office says it doesn't know." So we have a double jeopardy: it is not right that those who give their lives to preserve peace in society should have to go through this, or that those who have done all that should be taken by the hand and told that they should have a say in negotiations on the future of our Province.

The fact of the matter is that the Queen's Speech has only a few lines about what is happening in Northern Ireland. Interestingly, it says:

"Legislation will be brought forward on policing in Northern Ireland."

None of us on the Unionist side, including colleagues in the official Unionist party, understands what that is about. We were told that there were places on the Policing Board for our parties and that if we did not join by a certain day, we would never be allowed to enjoy those places until there were elections in Northern Ireland—we would forfeit our position. We said, "Well, if we join the board, will you bring IRA-Sinn Fein in by the back door?" In fairness to the man who was then Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, he said, "Certainly not. You either come in now or you don't come in." I know that he said the same to the Official Unionist leader and those with him.

We were told that no changes would be made to the board until a new election had been held, but extreme action is apparently being taken now. It seems that even the report that set up the present police structures will be changed. Throughout Northern Ireland, all we hear is, "We must get Sinn Fein on the police board", but that will not be possible if the commitment made to the Unionists is kept. They went on to the board on condition that IRA-Sinn Fein would not be represented on it until after the election.

Policing in Northern Ireland has been radically changed, as everyone knows. What are those changes? The last time I spoke to the Prime Minister, I said, "Mr. Durkan has announced that he knows what the changes are. I am a Member of the British House of Commons, which he is not, but I do not know what they are."

What are these changes? What is this legislation? We were told that an agreement was made at Weston Park. What was that agreement? The leader of the official Unionists told us that the meeting at Weston Park was called for one purpose alone: to discuss and settle decommissioning. Evidently, however, decommissioning had very little to do with any of the debates in Weston Park, but changes in the police had something to do with them. What are these changes? Is this another coin to buy off IRA-Sinn Fein? That is what is worrying the people of Northern Ireland.

The Belfast agreement has failed. It was bound to fail. It was supposed to have been built on the foundation that only those who had forsworn violence and given up their weapons could take part in the government of Northern Ireland or in negotiations to set up a legitimate Government of Northern Ireland; but that, as we know, is not what it was built on.

This matter will keep arising unless the Government face the fact that the obligations of even the Belfast agreement in regard to terrorists must be dealt with. There is no place in any Government, in the United Kingdom or anywhere else, for those who command terrorist support and use that support for their own ends.

The House should look seriously at the situation of Northern Ireland. It should consider, in particular, the fact that many of those who manned our jails were slaughtered by the IRA, as were many of their children. A number had to move house after the Castlereagh break-in, and millions of pounds had to be spent to shift them from their homes. If those who are now in control have to be moved, the money will run into many more millions. The former Secretary of State told us that a vast sum had been paid on the last occasion.

Surely the time has come for us to call a stop to this once and for all, and to say that only those who do not have armed gangs behind them to conduct night parades should be able to negotiate the future of Northern Ireland. During the day they are politicians; at night the gun comes out, and we see the tragedy.

When we had good security in Northern Ireland because of the troubles, there was less "petty crime", as it has been called—although no crime is really petty. Now we are seeing rape on our streets, the mugging of old people and the beating up of children. People are being nailed to gates and crucified. All that is happening because we have failed to deal with the root of the matter: the gunmen who can get concessions as a result of the pressure and blackmail that they can exert on those in power.

5.10 pm

Mr. David Clelland (Tyne Bridge): I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) and my hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Bow (Ms King) on their speeches, which were excellent.

There is much to welcome in the Government's programme for the Session, which is being debated at a time when the world is preoccupied with the war against terrorism and, we hope, avoiding a war between nations. I hope that in the next few months there will be positive advances on both fronts. As we witness yet another period of famine in Ethiopia that threatens the lives of millions of people and yet more trouble between Israel and the Palestinians, we must recognise that the great injustices and inequalities in the world that starve the helpless feed the terrorists.

The Queen's Speech is predominantly about domestic issues, and I shall concentrate on its contents in that respect. There is much in the speech about the need to step up the fight against crime and antisocial behaviour. I support that and look forward to the measures announced in the speech achieving a reduction in both areas. It is true that crime is not as prevalent as the perception and fear of it would suggest, but if people are intimidated into restricting their social activities and their freedom to move about their neighbourhoods because of that perception, we are not winning the war against crime.

Similarly, if people's lives are blighted by the yobbish, selfish and antisocial activities of others, we are not winning the war against antisocial behaviour. It is that sort of behaviour that most blights people's lives—more than crime, more than terrorism and more than the fear of wars—because it is local and personal to thousands of our citizens throughout the country.

Rev. Martin Smyth: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that there is a great possibility that the apparent decline in crime is, rather, a decline in recorded crime and that people are not recording it any longer because they are disillusioned?

Mr. Clelland: Disillusionment has spread across many aspects of our nation. Crime is one of them. There

[Mr. Clelland]

may be something in what the hon. Gentleman says, but I still believe that the perception of crime is much greater than the actual possibility of it affecting individuals. It is still a real fear.

I hope that the measures announced in the Loyal Address will have an impact on those and related problems, such as the indiscriminate scattering of litter on our streets, the chewing gum problem, animal excretions, people who empty the contents of their cars on to the side of the road and even throw rubbish out of moving vehicles on to roads and motorways. When I compare the state of some of the streets in our towns and cities with some of our close neighbours in Europe, I am ashamed that so many of our people seem oblivious to the way in which litter blights their environment, to say nothing of the vermin and disease that it attracts. We need a combination of penalties and education to begin to make inroads into the problems of litter, and a step change in our approach to recycling and the reduction of unnecessary packaging.

In my remarks on last year's Queen's Speech, I highlighted the fact that antisocial and neighbourhood problems could be reduced with the co-operation of private landlords. Indeed, in Newcastle and Gateshead, voluntary arrangements between landlords and the local authorities have had an effect. However, too many landlords are not interested in the effects that the behaviour of their tenants or indeed the condition of their properties have on the rest of the neighbourhood. We have heard from my right hon. Friend the Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron) of similar problems in his constituency.

In Newcastle and Gateshead, we know from bitter experience how that can lead to the complete rundown of an area, with decent people being driven out and their empty homes vandalised and often burned out. The resulting devaluation of the properties leaves people in negative equity and the whole area looking like something from the blitz. Houses are then sold off for knockdown prices and—surprise, surprise—who buys them? Often, it is the very landlords whose neglect contributed to the disaster in the first place. They then go to the local authority, asking for grants to help to restore the properties and increase their value. The fact that people can profit from such activity is even more unpalatable than the misery that they cause doing it.

Mr. Roy Beggs (East Antrim): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that another serious anomaly is that tenants in some private properties pay rents that are nearly twice what would be paid normally in council-owned properties, despite the fact that private landlords are allowing the properties to deteriorate? Surely someone should step in soon to ensure that tenants get a fair deal.

Mr. Clelland: I agree, except that it is often not the tenants who pay the rents but the taxpayer, who pays through housing benefit and social security. That matter definitely needs to be looked at, because through housing benefit we can help to control landlords. I very much welcome the inclusion in the Queen's Speech of measures to remedy the problem. Landlords must be made to bear some of the responsibility for the behaviour of their tenants, as well as for the condition of the property.

A system of licensing and regulations, accompanied by a requirement to issue tenants with proper and enforceable tenancy agreements, is long overdue. Local authorities will have a policing role to play, and I know that they will welcome the opportunity to help to put an end to blight and antisocial behaviour in their localities.

That brings me to the proposed local government Bill. The encouraging words of the Chancellor and the Deputy Prime Minister about releasing councils from the shackles that too often give the lie to the term "local government" will be welcomed by councillors up and down the country. The Government's devolution programme has to be about cascading decisions down to the most appropriate level: devolved assemblies and local government.

I hope that the Bill will also provide an opportunity to look at the proposals from the National Association of Councillors for some sort of recognition for long-serving councillors who retire from public life. A considerable number of elected councillors spend a considerable amount of their working lives on council work, so there should be some provision to ensure that they do not suffer a loss of pension as a result. The Bill might also include a provision for lump-sum payments so that councillors are not deterred from making way for younger candidates by the prospect of financial hardship.

Although not part of the Bill, the House will soon be told of the result of the consultations on the local government finance review. It is important that Ministers make every effort to get this right and make the system fair. The Prime Minister has said that he believes that the ability to make bold decisions is a virtue. This issue requires bold decisions, and I hope that Ministers are up to it. There is a north-south divide and the present system of local government finance is an integral part of it.

I have mentioned devolution and I very much welcome the inclusion in the Queen's Speech of legislative proposals to allow for referendums in the English regions on elected regional assemblies. That is long overdue and is an essential next step in the process that was started in 1997. I was disappointed by the response of the Leader of the Opposition. I know he was there when the Queen read out the Speech; I saw him. I am sure that he has a copy, but he seems to have the wrong end of the stick. He went on about how the Government were going to break up the United Kingdom, how the Deputy Prime Minister would impose a new tier of bureaucracy, how there would be burdens on business and how the Government were abolishing county councils. I wish that the proposals were substantial enough to merit such condemnation. The Queen's Speech does not propose any such thing; it proposes that people in the regions ought to have the right to decide for themselves. I cannot see why anyone in this House should want to deny people in the regions the right to decide for themselves whether they want regional government.

Mr. Don Foster (Bath): I agree entirely with the hon. Gentleman, but does he agree that when it comes to the

legislation on the referendum, it would be a huge mistake for the Government to continue to pursue the argument that the referendums should be on the dual issues of whether people want a directly elected regional assembly in their region and, in the same single question, whether they support any reorganisation of local government? Does he agree that they are two separate issues and should be treated separately?

Mr. Clelland: Having made that very point on the record, I can hardly change my mind on it now. I agree that local government reorganisation and the introduction of regional government are two completely separate issues. I am not saying that once regional government has been established there may not be a case for regional government's examining the local authority structure in its region and taking decisions, or at least recommending changes along those lines, but I shall certainly be arguing that we need not necessarily make this part of the legislation.

Meanwhile, I look forward to further consideration of the economic disparities between regions. This is a two-edged sword and it is now as much of a problem for the regions that have enjoyed its benefits as it is for those who for too long have suffered its consequences. The south-east is now overcrowded and over-congested. House prices are out of the reach of many average wage earners and key workers, causing problems for public services and private sector employees alike. The situation is becoming critical. At the same time, the north-east continues to suffer the United Kingdom's worst unemployment levels. The population continues to decline and empty properties abound. If regional policy does not address that disparity, people are entitled to ask what regional policy is for.

Mr. Bercow: The hon. Gentleman champions the empowerment of local government on the one hand but in the next breath and on the other hand he seems to support the creation of an additional layer of government, further away from the people. Why is it that he thinks that regional government is necessary, when surely the principle upon which local government should be based is that people's identification is with their parish, their village, their town or their district?

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): Order. That was a rather lengthy intervention.

Mr. Clelland: The hon. Gentleman is as ignorant as his leader on regional government. It is not about taking power from local government; on the contrary. *[Interruption.]* No, it is not. If Opposition Members had studied the subject more deeply, they might have understood that that is not the intention or the implication of what the Government want or what I would champion. Regional government is about power coming down from this place to the regions, not power coming up from local government.

Mr. Bill Wiggin (Leominster): Is the hon. Gentleman saying that the Government will simply give up power and hand it to the regions?

Mr. Clelland: I believe that the Government's record stands to be examined on its merits; they have already done just that, in Scotland, Wales and London—and in Northern Ireland, except that we have a bit of a hitch there at the moment. That is the Government's policy: to devolve power from the centre to regional assemblies and to national Parliaments and, let us hope, to regional assemblies in England as well. *[Interruption.]* If Conservative Members have not recognised that, I do not know what on earth they have been looking at.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): Will the hon. Gentleman explain why the Deputy Prime Minister said in his statement on 17 July that the regional spatial strategy would dictate to the unitary authorities, or the district or county councils, exactly how many houses were to be built in each area, and the densities? If that is not taking power from local government, I do not know what is.

Mr. Clelland: The hon. Gentleman should not assume that because we have a new tier of government, national Government will have no powers and nothing to do; or that regional government will take over everything and local government will have nothing to do. There will still be powers at each level. There will still be regional planning, of which local authorities will have to take account. There will still be national planning, of which regional authorities will have to take account. We are simply talking about each tier having the appropriate level of responsibility; that is all that it is about.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned the Deputy Prime Minister. I am unaware of the specific remark that he mentioned, but the Deputy Prime Minister does plan to publish in the coming Session a national communities plan, which promises the most far-reaching changes in housing policy for 30 years. However, if it merely means more new towns in the south, the problems will continue to get worse. If step changes are in vogue, nowhere are they more needed than in regional policy. The Government should consider more decentralisation of Government Departments and the moving of jobs into the regions. More should be done to encourage economic activity and business development in the north. Too many old myths about the north still abound and too many who have never travelled there still harbour images of pit heaps, flat caps, grey skies and depression. For too many, the truth remains an untold story. The north-east in particular is an historic and beautiful region of England. We have the cleanest beaches, most beautiful countryside, good internal transport links and forward-looking public authorities. A great deal of work is being done in the region to overcome the difficulties. I am particularly proud of the renaissance on Tyneside, my birthplace, and we are determined that, should we succeed in our capital of culture bid, the benefits will be spread throughout the north-east and will help to dispel the myths.

We need even more than that, however, for our long-term survival and revival. Central government must take economic decisions that will attract jobs to the north and cool the economy in the south. We need more fiscal and other incentives to encourage business start-ups, improvements to the inter-regional transport infrastructure and fast, direct passenger and freight access to the channel tunnel. We need to be linked to the country's motorway network—we are the only region in the country that is not so linked—through

[Mr. Clelland]

improvements to the A1, A69 and A66. We need better use of regional airports and sea ports, and there should be more urgency in investing in improvements to the east and west coast rail lines.

Regional government will help us to help ourselves. I fear, however, notwithstanding the step forward in the Loyal Address, that that is still some way off, and more urgent action will be needed if we are to prevent the north and the south from suffering even more discomfort as a result of the economic disparities between them. Devolution to Scotland, Wales and London—welcome though that has been—has further disadvantaged the English regions economically and politically. It surely cannot be right that Scotland and Wales continue to have Secretaries of State sitting in the Cabinet, and that there should be a Minister for London, when they also have devolved assemblies. I am not making a personal attack on any of the Ministers concerned, or on the devolved assemblies, but it cannot be fair that they are doubly advantaged in such a way to the detriment of the rest of us. One Secretary of State for the nations and regions, with Ministers for Scotland, Wales and England to assist, is surely all that is now required.

I hope that the new Session will also see positive steps to improve the pensions regime. Although I accept that improvements have been made, and that the poorest pensioners have benefited from Government policies, much more needs to be done to ensure security in retirement for too many of our citizens, and to provide a direct link between pensions and the prosperity of the nation. Security in old age would be the greatest service that we could provide for our people.

That brings me nicely to my final point: House of Lords reform. The intention of the Joint Committee seems to be that the House should be given a range of choices on the way forward, and there will be opportunities for further debate in due course. I appeal to colleagues on both sides of the House whose love of democracy drives them to conclude that an elected second Chamber would enhance our system of government to think hard and long before voting for such an outcome in the new Session. It is surely simplistic to argue that if the second Chamber is elected it must therefore be better. One could infer from such an argument that the country would be better run by rolling referendum. Democracy is desirable, of course, but people would not thank us for an inefficient democracy—one that was constantly deadlocked because of competing mandates. The second Chamber should enhance, not obstruct, the process of government. At the same time, it cannot, of course, continue on the basis of patronage. A representative, responsible and respected second Chamber could be constructed by transferring the responsibility for selecting representatives to the country as a whole, not by direct election but by giving devolved assemblies, organisations and institutions, employers and trade unions the responsibility to provide people who could truly act in an advisory capacity.

Mr. Bercow: The hon. Gentleman is addressing a central question. Would he not agree that creative tension between the two Houses of Parliament, far from being a bad thing, could serve to check the legislative appetite of the Government if only a self-denying ordinance were applied?

Mr. Clelland: That depends on what should be the role of the second Chamber. The hon. Gentleman provokes me to make a longer speech than I had intended. With all due respect, however, I do not see the role of the second Chamber as being a check on the Executive. That is the job of Opposition Members, and of Back Bench Labour Members, and it should not be the job of the second Chamber. I do not, however, want to pursue that line at the moment.

A second Chamber made up as I have suggested would provide a good regional and demographic spread of representatives, and would also provide what has eluded us in direct elections so far—a House that is truly representative of gender and ethnicity.

5.30 pm

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham): I have declared my interests in the register.

In the Gracious Speech, Her Majesty said:

"This approach will enable my Government to continue to invest in the public services, while supporting major programmes of reform on health, education, transport and crime."

The Government are right to recognise the dreadful failure during their five years in office to deliver the public services that people require. They are right to realise that they need to do something dramatic to improve and change the situation. All too many of us have daily evidence in our constituencies of patients who are waiting far too long to get treatment or who are unsure when they will be diagnosed or allowed into an out-patient clinic. All too often we have evidence of parents whose children are not allowed to go to a popular or successful school and who are sent against their choice to a school down the road that will often have results far worse than the school they would like their children to attend.

Above all, my constituents and those of most right hon. and hon. Members are only too well aware of the catastrophic collapse of our transport system. The Government, the many Labour councils and the independent rogue Labour Mayor of London are making the situation worse for those who have to use their motor cars, while offering no positive, attractive or feasible alternative to enable our constituents to get their children to school, or to enable them to get to work, to the shops, to meet their friends or to attend leisure facilities in the evenings.

The most disappointing aspect of the Gracious Speech is the Government's refusal to realise that many of their problems in public services are self-inflicted. They have come about because this Government are the Government of tax and waste. They seriously believe that if they just announce a lot of extra money and tip a lot of extra money willy-nilly into the public services from the centre, there will be a miraculous transformation and suddenly nurses and doctors will be available in abundance, patients will be treated, pupils will be well educated, A-levels will go swimmingly and all will go well.

The Government are discovering the hard way that tipping a lot of money into an over-bureaucratic and over-centralised system can make matters worse and,

clearly, often does not make them better. Instead of a tax-and-waste Government, I want a Government who are dedicated to proper public service reform that gives freedom to those in schools, hospitals and surgeries to run them in the way that they think best. I want a Government who give real choice and real freedom to all our constituents so that they can take advantage of free treatment or free places while choosing between different providers. I want constituents to exercise some control and to be treated better by the system as a result.

Over the 15 years during which I have been proud to represent my constituents in the House, I have never attended or heard of a debate about the bread supply. Bread is a crucial public service but miraculously, day after day, a good range of loaves is provided in the shops to my constituents and others. The bread industry even manages to handle the phenomenal demand for hot cross buns just before Easter. I never see notices in the shops saying, "Please delay buying your hot cross buns until October. We are short because there is a rush on them." The bread industry manages to handle that by the magic of free enterprise, choice and freedom. Yet when in the winter there is a rush of people with flu who want an even more important public service—the service of decent health care—they are told, "It is impossible to handle all these people because they have all chosen to have flu at the same time."

Brian White (Milton Keynes, North-East): Is the right hon. Gentleman advocating that every industry should receive the same subsidy as the agricultural industry?

Mr. Redwood: I am not advocating that, although I am advocating a system that delivers health free at the point of use and therefore rightly attracts much heavier subsidies overall than the agricultural industry. The hon. Gentleman will also realise that if we broke up the CAP or distanced ourselves it, as the Government sometimes say they want to but never manage to do, we could buy our wheat on the international market at a considerably lower price with no subsidy and we would have even cheaper bread from the free enterprise bakery industry, which has delivered so well throughout my time in the House. The difference between our handling of the bread supply and the way in which we sort out our hospitals is that we allow ingenuity, innovation, choice and freedom in the one and we have centralisation, bureaucracy and control in the other.

I shall give the House another, even more relevant, analogy: I have never noticed that we have a shortage of hotel beds or holiday places. Many people want to go on holiday at the same time of year, but that does not seem to cause a peaking problem, and many want to use hotels in the same town or city at the same time, particularly when they go to party conferences or pensions conferences, but the free enterprise sector manages to take care of all that. Magically, there are places, and people are not normally turned away. We do not hear many modern versions of the Christmas story with people being turned away as a result of a shortage of hotel accommodation such as that which unfortunately occurred when taxation got in the way in the holy land some 2,000 years ago.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that in both cases there is a considerable surplus, which makes it possible to offer choice? He may not regular attend Prayers, but does he accept that we pray for our daily bread every day in this House?

Mr. Redwood: I do not know where the hon. Gentleman has been. I have often prayed in the House and my prayer has always been answered. That demonstrates the miracle of combining religious faith with free enterprise. At the risk of not showing due deference to one much mightier than anyone here, I have a suspicion that free enterprise has rather more to do with that particular prayer being answered, but that is all part of the greater scheme. All this will come to pass, even to the hon. Gentleman in due course when he seeks a place far higher than he has already achieved in this mortal life. *[Interruption.]* I would not be so cruel as to suggest that he wishes to go to the other place, and I do not believe that the Government would allow him to do so.

If the Government really meant what the Prime Minister told the Labour party conference, they would break up the monoliths of state provision. The Prime Minister certainly talks the talk but on this occasion he is unable to walk the walk because he is supported, or undermined, by Ministers and Members of Parliament who simply do not have their heart in public service reform. That is why it is the duty of the Conservative party, the Loyal Opposition, to set out how we can give people choice and freedom and how we can achieve the necessary expansion in the capacity of public services.

The hon. Gentleman, who said that the problem is one of shortage, is quite right. Is not it interesting that on transport the Government have such different policies and achieve such different results? I would be happy to support much of the Government's aviation policy because it promotes free enterprise, choice and competition. As a result of pursuing that policy, we have a surplus of airplane seats. We could leave the Chamber and book a flight to almost anywhere, and providers would be scrambling to offer us seats at ever lower prices to try to fill capacity. That is the joy of freedom and free enterprise delivering the goods. If, however, we want to drive a car we are handicapped by having to use a public monopoly road, so we are short of road space. If we want to hire a private sector train seat, we are hamstrung by the insufficient capacity of track and signals in the right areas at the right time of day, so again supply is short thanks to a public monopoly or an over-regulated business.

This Government have over-centralised and over-regulated, and wherever they have intervened most, the catastrophic effects have been greatest. Let us consider recent examples. The Government decided that they knew better than the marketplace how to run a railway, and they intervened very badly in Railtrack. Instead of doing a deal and breaking the monopoly, which would have produced better results, they decided to bankrupt the company and set up Network Rail, an operation financed according to the so-called third way. That has created a massive delay in new projects, a huge overspend and a bonanza for consultants. We are now two or three years away from making any progress in increasing railway capacity, which we need. Where are the new signals, the new lines and the dealing with bottlenecks that are clearly required before we can hope

[Mr. Redwood]

to divert more people and freight from road to rail? The Government's intervention has caused delay and damage.

Next, let us take the Government's ham-fisted intervention in this country's examinations system. Many young people have been bitterly disappointed—they were misled about their grades, then led to believe that they would be revised; the grades of some were revised, but others were let down again by being told that their grades were not to be revised after all. Unfortunately, confidence in the system has been damaged by the clumsy intervention of the Government and their quangos. There was a huge row between the quango chief and the Minister responsible: the Minister made sure the quango chief left, then decided that she had to go as well. At least it was an honest resignation. That affair underlines the fact that all too often the Government intervene and make things worse, and that centralisation and bureaucracy do not work.

Precisely the same theme is seen in the Government's law and order policy. In the Gracious Speech, the Government propose a large number of legislative measures, but most people looking at our criminal justice system would say that what is needed is the Government to get out of the way of the police and let them get on with their proper job of trying to apprehend offenders. It is difficult to prosecute people successfully through the courts and produce the right sort of sentences when the rate of detection is so low, so the Government should ask why the rate of detection remains so low.

There are two obvious reasons for that. The first has been set out by my right hon. Friend the shadow Home Secretary—there are not enough policemen. We look forward to the Government spending some of those huge extra sums on recruiting more police, rather than on recruiting more bureaucrats. The other, even more important reason is the use we currently make of our policemen. Any Member of Parliament who goes out in the evenings or at the weekend with the local police force hears the same story—that police are snowed under with paperwork, deluged with circulars, advice notes, requirements and forms. They spend far too much time in the police station handling the paperwork because that is the requirement imposed by the Government and the Home Office.

If the Government got out of the way, if they understood that they could purge the system of a great deal of the paperwork and did so, a lot more policemen would suddenly be able to do what they need to do—walking around, being a visible presence, picking up intelligence from their contacts on the streets, and, immediately after burglaries, thefts and crimes of vandalism and damage, pursuing the people who are likely to have committed the offences, or witnesses who might be able to help. All too often, my constituents tell me that the police were unable to attend within a reasonable period after an offence was committed, so the trail went cold; and the reason that the police were unable to attend was that too many of them were bogged down in paperwork back at headquarters.

We are told that the Government are now on the case and we have been given some fascinating paperwork. My right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition referred to it in his excellent speech, but I think that the House should be given more information. The Government have homed in on the problem of excess paperwork in the education service. To illustrate that, I shall read the project summary from "Good Practice in Cutting Bureaucracy Volume 2"—a real must for any insomniac seeking bedtime reading. The fact that in all there are three volumes of this great tome is itself a delicious irony or a paradox. I cannot detain the House by reading all of it, but it might be helpful if I give a little flavour. The project summary states:

"In January 2000 the then Department for Education and Employment"—

which reminds us that since then the Department has been though changes of name, logo and literature; a worthy expense, I am sure—

"asked PricewaterhouseCoopers to undertake a project to 'Investigate, Test and Implement a Holistic Approach to Reducing Bureaucratic Burdens in a Range of Schools'. This was a second phase of work, which aimed to build on the work of Phase 1"—

very logical—

"by focusing on how individual schools could implement good practice in setting up 'lean burn' management and administrative systems across the full range of their activities. Phase 2 focused in particular on"—

and so it continues, for several pages. You will have noticed, Madam Deputy Speaker, given your great attention to such matters, that the project summary tries to streamline schools' response to the massive amount of paperwork emanating from the Department for Education and Skills. There is nothing in phase 2 about the Government requiring schools to do less, although their wanting all those things caused the massive workload in the first place.

"Good Practice in Cutting Bureaucracy", which is not necessarily a beginners' guide, as a scholarship in gobbledegook is still required to understand the finer points, expects each school to begin by drawing up a plan—a suitably bureaucratic response—and undertake a thorough review of all the paperwork foisted on it by Her Majesty's Government; it is not allowed to cast that paperwork in the wastepaper bin. The simplest way to get schools moving again is to tell them, "Dump everything from the Department in the bin and get on with teaching children."

Mr. Ken Purchase (Wolverhampton, North-East): The right hon. Gentleman has amused the House with his anecdotal evidence, which many of us have heard before from friends and relatives who teach. What does he suggest are the best lines of accountability for parents who want to know more about what their children are doing and achieving at school? Does he have a formula for achieving that without teachers being involved in significant paperwork?

Mr. Redwood: I would like to leave that to teachers and parents. The best ways of communicating are perhaps the traditional reports on pupils, and sessions during which parents can meet teachers and talk to them about their children. That always worked when I was a parent with children at state school, and I am sure that it can continue to work in schools with the time and energy to do it. Schools do not need massive bureaucracy from quangos and national Government

insisting that they complete forms for national record purposes. The hon. Gentleman will appreciate that teachers could usefully spend most of that time teaching children and a limited period communicating directly with parents and pupils to keep them up to date on progress.

I have therefore recommended that my right hon. and hon. Friends in a future Conservative manifesto offer to abolish the apartheid that divides independent and state schools. Everyone should be allowed to go to an independent school, and I would like every state school to become independent. Schools could adopt a number of forms, and choose whether to become a mutual or teachers' co-operative—that may attract the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, North-East (Mr. Purchase)—or a profit or not-for-profit private company. I would guarantee that money would flow from taxpayers to pay for free places for the many pupils whose parents wanted the free place that their children currently enjoy. However, I would not be prescriptive—I would not stop schools allowing top-up fees or charging much higher fees than average, as long as there was a guarantee of free places at good-quality schools for everyone who wanted them.

Mr. Soley: The two broad thrusts of the right hon. Gentleman's argument are about cutting public expenditure and privatising more public services. He has been saying that to enthusiastic nods from his Front Bench. Are those two policies the policies of the Conservative party?

Mr. Redwood: The Conservative party will set out its proposals on taxation and spending in the next Parliament nearer the time of that Parliament. I fully support my right hon. and hon. Friends on the importance of studying things carefully and not making our plans known until the Government have published theirs. The hon. Gentleman could not tell me about the spending plans that the Labour Government will put to the electorate at the next election in the hope of winning another term. When we have seen those plans, we will able to say how much more or less we will wish to spend in a number of different areas. I strongly believe that we should spend a lot less in big areas that have been deliberately expanded by the Government, but not on schools and hospitals, or nurses, teachers or policemen, on whom we should spend more. We may have at least to match Labour's spending plans or direct even more money at those crucial public servants. However, those services account for only a quarter of total public spending.

I would love to slash the regional government that Ministers constantly foist on us. I want no regional government at all in my part of the country. The Government do not even know what my region is called. Sometimes we are the rest of the south-east, sometimes we are London and the south-east, sometimes we are Wessex, and sometimes we are the Thames valley. They do not know, because where I live, there is no entity that is a region.

Mr. Clelland: Would the right hon. Gentleman inform the House what research he has done into the costs to which he refers? How much will regional government cost, and what proportion is that of national expenditure?

Mr. Redwood: I have indeed researched the cost. I can assure the hon. Gentleman that in the months ahead I will be producing plans that will save billions of pounds by reducing the Government overhead, and save several hundred millions from the regional government area. We do not need a regional government office in Guildford or the south-east.

Mr. Tyler: I am following the right hon. Gentleman's thesis with great interest and have memories of his sojourn in the Welsh Office. Can he say whether it is his policy to abolish devolution in Wales, and what the saving would be if he did?

Mr. Redwood: No, I am not recommending that, because the Welsh and the Scottish people were offered a different type of government and voted for it in a referendum. I would abolish the posts of Secretary of State for Wales and for Scotland—and for Northern Ireland if it goes back to having a devolved Assembly. I see no point in paying twice for the same thing. The people of Wales, Scotland and indeed England are paying for the superstructure of First Ministers and all their supporting staff in the devolved Assemblies, and there is no need for a similar establishment in Whitehall. There is a need for one senior Minister, who would probably be properly styled Secretary of State for the regions and local government, and who would argue the case in Cabinet for the relative sums of money that needed to go to English local government and to Scottish, Welsh and Northern Ireland devolved Assemblies. That Minister would have more detailed duties in England, because he would be facing a range of responsibilities day by day and week by week in English local government, whereas one would hope that he would have to intervene very little in the devolved Assemblies in the other parts of the United Kingdom.

David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire): The right hon. Gentleman said that he would not reverse the settled position that exists in Wales and Scotland, not least because the people voted for those arrangements by a majority. If, by the time of any change in government, the regions in the north, the west midlands or wherever had similarly voted by a majority for an elected regional assembly, would that be sufficient for him to desist from reversing that position?

Mr. Redwood: It might be, but we would need to cross many hurdles before we got there. The hon. Gentleman assumes that the necessary legislation would go through; that a referendum would then be called; and that a region would be foolish enough to vote for a regional assembly. Those are three rather big ifs, and he should have a little modesty. Legislation sometimes gets modified or changed in both Houses of Parliament. That is a noble tradition, and he should be a little careful, in case he pre-empts all the discretion that the Houses have.

Looking at the problem in the run-up to an election, my hon. Friends would obviously investigate very carefully both turnout and percentage majority, should

[Mr. Redwood]

the event that the hon. Gentleman describes come to pass. My observation in London was that very few people wanted devolved London government. If we re-ran that referendum today, I suspect that even fewer would want that outcome, because they now know that it was an expensive waste of time and money. I did not include London, as I believe the Conservative party has serious thinking to do about London.

I am not sure that the mayoralty is serving the capital well. It may need to have its powers even more reduced. It has no significant powers, but those that it does have, it seems to abuse and use to make life difficult. Perhaps we need to ask the public in a general election or a further referendum whether it was a good idea to save the money. It looks as though the present mayor is all tax and waste, and doing that to an even greater degree in London than the Government are doing for the country as a whole.

Mr. Bercow: Does my right hon. Friend agree that the premise upon which regionalism is based is that in some sense we in this country suffer from too few politicians and too little government? Is that not eccentric, to put it mildly?

Mr. Redwood: Indeed. My hon. Friend warms my heart. There needs to be a powerful voice in this country for fewer politicians and fewer bureaucrats, and for some control to be placed on the political classes. The Government have been a wonderful Government for the political classes and their bag carriers, advisers and consultants. With reference to an earlier intervention, one of the big areas in which I would like to see huge cuts is in the amount of money that we waste on the political classes themselves. We do not need huge armies of politicians at every conceivable level and layer.

In some parts of the country now, we have parish councils, district councils, county councils, regional offices, regional development agencies, national Government and the European Union—massive bureaucracies. The result for the public is that they pay the bill many times over for expensive staff, consultants and, in many cases, politicians. They all row with each other; they often do deals in private behind closed doors; and the public find it very difficult to understand who has done what, whom they can blame and whom they can throw out. We need much less of it, and the politicians whom we do have should be much more accountable.

Mr. Don Foster: Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that we have too much regional governance, given that in every region there are some 70-odd quangos spending billions of pounds, and costing a great deal of money because of all the quangocrats that run them, each operating in its individual silo with no joined-up thinking, and no opportunity for local people to have any influence on what they do? Surely regional government, directly elected, would provide an opportunity to bring functions together, reduce some of the bureaucratic costs, ensure that there is more joined-up thinking and ensure that there is true democratic accountability? May I add one further brief point? I would agree with the right hon. Gentleman—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. That intervention was too long.

Mr. Redwood: I am grateful, Madam Deputy Speaker. I got the drift of the hon. Gentleman's remarks. I agree with the first part; we have far too many quangos and unelected bodies.

Mr. Tyler: You set them up.

Mr. Redwood: The hon. Gentleman says that I set them up. He is mistaking history. He should know that, as Secretary of State for Wales, I transferred some powers from quangos to local government and wanted to do rather more, but other events transpired which took my interest at the time. He should also know that the present Government have become the king and queen of the quangos. It is they who have transferred to quangos huge areas that were previously accountable directly to this House. They have transferred a big chunk of our economic policy to the Bank of England. They have transferred our food safety policy to a new agency. They have transferred more powers over the environment to the Environment Agency. They have transferred most City regulation to the Financial Services Authority, whereas much of that was originally under Ministers at the Department of Trade and Industry and the Treasury.

There has been a massive transfer. In each case, the Government have argued that technicians and professionals are better at doing those things than elected people. The ideal world for Labour Ministers is one where they have a completely empty Red Box and a very large salary, and can say on every matter that it is absolutely nothing to do with them, because they know a quango down the road that will carry the can.

In the regional area, to which the hon. Gentleman drew my attention, I would like to see the functions that are worth carrying out transferred to elected local government, and the others abolished. I would like my local council to have real planning powers, I would like it rather than the Environment Agency to deal with matters such as flood control, I would like it to deal with some aspects of law and order, and I would like to see the quangos in those areas abolished or given a thoroughly good haircut, so that they spend much less of our money and trouble us far less than they currently do.

If we in the House are serious about democracy, we should be saying to the Government, "You have given away far too many powers. You set up too many quangos. You transferred far too many important functions outside democratic control. You have given away massive powers to the European Union. You are not serious, Government, about creating democratic accountability." Everything that Ministers do, as the Queen's Speech reveals, transfers matters away from probing, from the light of democracy, from challenge and from accountability in the Chamber. I would like to see a streamlined Government. I would like to see us curb the political classes. I would like us to have far

fewer elected politicians, but I would like those whom we do have to be in serious Chambers, doing a serious job of work.

David Taylor: The right hon. Gentleman seems to be making an immensely powerful and persuasive case for democratic centralism, which as I remember did for Stalin. Would it do for the Conservative party as well?

Mr. Redwood: The hon. Gentleman has clearly been listening to a different debate. The main proposals that I have put forward are for true devolution. I want schools in every part of the country to be independent, to get their money because pupils go there on free places, and to choose how to spend that money. That would mean that they got far more money to spend on education than they currently get, because the huge educational quangos and the national Government machinery would be cut back, and the money would be better spent.

I want the Government to propose foundation hospital status for all hospitals and to give those hospitals real independence so that patients have choice, and I want those hospitals to have enough independence to be able to borrow and spend money so that they can provide the extra capacity that we so clearly need.

I want there to be bridges between the public and the private sectors. I do not want to live in a world like the one in which I was brought up where there was an apartheid whereby someone from a low income family like me simply could not go to the really smart hospitals and schools. I want everyone to be able to go to an independent school or hospital if they so choose, and I want the money to follow them out of taxpayers' revenues. That would be cheaper, better and fairer, and it would expand capacity and bring the joy of choice and free enterprise to public services. It would implement the Prime Minister's strange idea that he will break the monoliths of state provision. I only wish he would.

The Queen's Speech is a ragbag of hopeless ideas. It does not go nearly far enough. It will not give hospitals or schools independence; it will not give people choice; and it will not solve the shortages and the transport problem. My right hon. and hon. Friends are right to oppose it.

6 pm

Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): I completely disagree with the right hon. Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood) on devolution and good governance, but I also think that many of my hon. Friends understate the case for having real devolution throughout the United Kingdom. The fact is that this Parliament, of which I am proud, tries to do too much and does it badly. Moreover, the Government are overtasked. Comparable big democracies, whether in Canberra, Ottawa, Washington, Moscow, and certainly Berlin, have a legislature and a Government who are charged with defence, foreign affairs, broad macro-economic and social policy. We should be arguing not about whether there is a great desire for devolved government; we should be arguing for it positively on grounds of good governance. When my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister meets President Putin, Prime Minister Chrétien, the Chancellor of Germany, or the President of the United States they deal with only broad macro-economic and social policy, defence and foreign affairs. They are not charged with or expected to be able to understand, pontificate and decide on all the other important matters that are sensibly dealt with by either the provincial premier, the governor of a particular state, the president of a Land, or the president of an oblast in the Russian Federation. It makes good sense to devolve down.

There should be constitutional symmetry. The same powers that exist for Scotland should also be devolved to the other units of the United Kingdom. I do not minimise the task. I realise that the south-east in particular has no natural boundaries. Nevertheless, many states tackle that and in my lifetime I want to see a federalised United Kingdom with a strong central legislature focusing on matters of most importance and for which we as a legislature can most effectively provide in statute and scrutiny. In truth, much of the scrutiny that we pretend to do is a charade.

I do not want to delay the House too long on that theme, but I remember being held here night after night on a two-line Whip on the Cardiff Bay Barrage Bill. That is extremely important to the people of Wales, but the good people of Tilbury did not lie awake at night worrying about it. That is sensibly a matter for the people of Wales. Equally, my friends from Caithness and Sutherland should not be too exercised about London taxi Bills or London governance. Those are matters that should be dealt with at a much more local level.

Mr. Bercow *rose—*

Andrew Mackinlay: As the hon. Gentleman is a decent fellow, I shall give way to him.

Mr. Bercow: Given the hon. Gentleman's commitment to the decentralisation of power, can he name a single example of a directive or regulation that has been repealed under the terms of the protocol on subsidiarity and proportionality under the treaty of Amsterdam?

Andrew Mackinlay: No, this is not a quiz. I am for devolution and for subsidiarity to maximise that. I do not have the time to paint a great canvas on how I should like the United Kingdom's constitution to be substantially reformed. I shall do that on another occasion in the Chamber or sitting down with the hon. Gentleman.

I come now to the Queen's Speech and I want to get off my chest early on some of my concerns. I welcome much of its thrust and contents. However, with regard to the reform of the House of Lords, I am concerned by the reference to giving further consideration to the report of the Joint Committee. That is parliamentary speak for kicking into touch and I do not like it. We need to deal with the so-called second phase of the reform of the House of Lords. I favour a wholly elected House, but being a reasonable man I shall settle for a substantial wedge or slice of democratically elected members of the upper House because, as night follows day, in my lifetime it will be wholly elected because it would be unsustainable to have some people placed there by

[Andrew Mackinlay]

patronage with no mandate or legitimacy arguing against those who have the force, protection and authority of having been put there by the electorate.

Mr. Soley: As a member of the Joint Committee, I must place it on the record that there is no way that I or, I think, the majority of that Committee will ever allow the issue to be kicked into touch. We want it back here, we want it soon, and we want the reform to continue. I give my hon. Friend that assurance, certainly from my point of view.

Andrew Mackinlay: I am grateful for that reassurance.

I come now to an omission from the Queen's Speech. I had hoped that there would be an indication that legislation would be brought before us to create corporate criminal liability. In Britain, unlike elsewhere, boards of directors can wash their hands when things go wrong and when lives are lost through bad board decisions and selfish interests. It is always the poor train driver, lorry driver, coach driver or ferry captain who take the rap, never the directors. I had hoped to see that measure included.

Sir Teddy Taylor (Rochford and Southend, East) *rose—*

Andrew Mackinlay: I am pleased by the interest in my speech, but I cannot give way each time. However, as it is the man from Essex who is seeking to intervene, I shall do so on this occasion.

Sir Teddy Taylor: As the hon. Gentleman, who I know is a very wise person, has promoted elections for the House of Lords and for the regional councils, and as 25 per cent. voted in the elections for the European Parliament and the percentage voting in the general election dropped to 60 per cent., what percentage of the people of Tilbury does he think will vote for elections for the House of Lords and for the regional assembly based in Cambridge?

Andrew Mackinlay: I never uttered the word assembly. I want regional devolved parliaments. One of the problems of the Greater London Authority and the Welsh Assembly is that, rather like Bossom, they are neither one thing nor the other. We want proper parliaments to which people can relate. There is a major problem in engaging the electorate with Government. This place is treated cynically by the electorate and it is time that we reformed.

I do not want to take up too much time, so I hope that hon. Members will forgive me if I do not allow too many more interventions. I want to give notice to the Front Bench in relation to the provision to speed up the planning process. I do so because the Chief Whip likes to know if Members do not intend to support legislation. This Member for Thurrock may do, but he wants to see the Bill. I do not like that terminology because it is BAA speak and that of other big battalions in the country for saying that the terminal 5 Heathrow inquiry and the like were awfully irritating.

I do not want any erosion of the ability of the little man or woman or the small residents' group to frustrate some of the big interests in this country, of which the best example is BAA. I know that BAA has uttered the words in the Queen's Speech, as I have heard it do so both publicly and privately. Events have been awfully irritating for it and I think that the terminal 5 inquiry results were wrong, but my goodness it was absolutely right that such interests should have to fight all the way to get their planning permission. I think that this House should jealously safeguard the interests of the small objector against the big, powerful interests. Two or three Whips are present. I give notice to the Chief Whip that the Whips must use all their powers of persuasion and patronage on me before I shall support the measure.

I welcome the fact that legislation is to be introduced on hunting with dogs. I am opposed to hunting with dogs, but the issue has not tremendously exercised me. I am amazed that it appears to be almost the most important concern of all for some Members of Parliament, although perhaps I am doing them an injustice. Above all, I want it to be resolved. I have been a Member of Parliament for 10 years, and after six or seven years under a Labour Government, it is time for us to include on the statute book a banning of this unacceptable sport. After some time has passed, people will be amazed that it was tolerated and children will say "Grandad, did they really allow the hunting of animals with dogs, so that they could be torn apart?" It will be one of those activities on which people look back with amazement, like bear baiting and so on. Let us resolve the issue once and for all.

My good people in Thurrock will welcome the measures announced in the Queen's Speech to end antisocial behaviour. One colleague listed items of behaviour that are relatively minor in themselves, including litter and dog fouling. When I travel on the train to my constituency and elsewhere in London, it almost seems a condition of travel that people have to put their feet up on the seats. I am amazed that some professional people in grey suits—some of them even look like the hon. Members in the Chamber—put their feet up on the seats, even though they would never dream of doing so at home. We need to try to reverse that culture. It is not the most important thing in the world, but people do not seem to think that there is corporate ownership or have pride and respect. It is often some of the professional groups that are the most offensive in those areas.

When we come each year to today's ceremony, we are given some time for reflection. Many of us, if not the overwhelming majority, take enormous pride in the privilege of serving in this Parliament with all its rich history. We are mindful of the mandate that we are given by our electors and of what a great honour it is to serve here. I was thinking today that it is 40 years since I first entered the House of Commons, not as a Member, but as a visitor.

Mr. Purchase: As a little boy.

Andrew Mackinlay: Yes. I remember the scene. Harold Wilson was shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer. I thought that it was magic to see all the Members of Parliament with their feet up on the seats. Before the installation of television cameras, it was

almost mandatory for Front Benchers to have their feet up on the Table. I was fascinated by that. It does not happen now as a matter of rule, but it was done in those days.

I also remember Harold Wilson chiding Iain Macleod, who had said in a speech the week before that

"Nations gain their right to rise
By service and by sacrifice."

Wilson said the same and added:

"Britain aims to reach the top with capital gains and the betting shop!"—[*Official Report*, 18 July 1961; Vol. 644, c. 1181–82.]

There was a tremendous howl of laughter and I thought "This is good; I must have a slice of the action." It took me five general elections and another 25 years before I could get elected. I rushed into the Chamber, sat on the Front Bench and threw up my legs, but they did not reach the Table. I think that that must have been an omen that the Front Bench was not for me.

I, too, remember making my maiden speech 10 years ago. I welcome this debate in which we can paint a broad canvass, while the other days of debates on the gracious speech are allocated subject areas. On considering today's Queen's Speech, I thought it would be appropriate to read what was said 10 years ago, to see what I said and what was mentioned in that Queen's Speech. Obviously, the same themes were dealt with. Transport was mentioned and I raised the question of my London-Tilbury-Southend line. The service is now called c2c, which some people call "chaos to chaos" or "cancellation to cancellation".

I also spoke about the port of Tilbury and my concerns about privatisation. The port is now very good, but I have raised in the House during the past few weeks my concerns about port security. The port of Tilbury is very secure and has a small and dedicated police force. Indeed, the hon. Member for Rochford and Southend, East (Sir Teddy Taylor) and I joined the force in its recent bicentennial celebrations. The point is relevant because our seaports are generally not policed in the way that Tilbury is. There are only a few small and dedicated port police forces. At a time when there is maximum danger from the terrorist threat and massive human trafficking, however, I implore the Government to consider establishing a national ports police along the lines of the forces that exist in the ports of Tilbury, Felixstowe, Dover, Tees, Hartlepool and—I think—Merseyside. It is common sense that we should have such a force, and the sooner the better.

Health delivery was also mentioned, as it has been today. I was concerned about the closure of Orsett hospital in the borough of Thurrock and the concentration of all our resources in Basildon. Basildon hospital has now been established. It is doing a very good job and is a centre of excellence, but it is on overload. I still think that the Government should revisit the matter in relation to my particular area.

I was pleased to see in the Queen's Speech that the Government want to address a growing problem that is seen by many hon. Members—bed blocking. Although we try to score party political points on the issue, we need to ensure that local authorities have the necessary resources and implement the necessary measures to get out of hospital people who should not be there occupying beds. I see that that is heralded in the Queen's Speech and I welcome it very much.

The need for scrutiny is an issue on which I think I was prophetic in my maiden speech and which is relevant to today's speech from the Throne. I said in my first speech in Parliament that there was a need to buttress and enhance Select Committees. Whatever sins I have committed since, I was certainly a robust member of the Select Committee on Transport, of which you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, were a member at the same time. We certainly gave the previous Conservative Government a good run for their money on a range of contentious issues, including the foolishness of rail privatisation. In the two Parliaments in which I have served on the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs, I have certainly not been held back from scrutinising my hon. Friends in their stewardship and conduct of our external relations.

The greater use of pre-legislative scrutiny is very much welcomed and the Government should be proud of it. It is another increment in creating more openness and reversing the trend of centralisation, which is to some extent inexorable and is not the fault of any one Government of a particular persuasion. It is in the nature of modern government, and I look to this Labour Government to be conscious of that and to continue to introduce measures to ensure that the legislature is more relevant and can scrutinise even more, and properly contribute to, the legislative process. Everyone here knows that at the present time, statutes are largely produced by Governments. A Bill is introduced and, because of parliamentary timetables and the backwards and forwards between the two Houses, Labour and Tory Governments rarely agree to amendments, whether they were tabled by Opposition Members or from their own Benches, and even if they would improve the measure. Such acceptance happens only very grudgingly and exceptionally. That is wrong. Members of Parliament can contribute and make better statutes if they are given the opportunity to do so in pre-legislative and other Committee processes.

Richard Younger-Ross (Teignbridge): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that pre-legislative consideration should be extended to European legislation, so that we can have an input to the debate in Europe before such legislation comes to this House and we are given the faits accomplis that are often sent down to us?

Andrew Mackinlay: Absolutely. The hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow), who is not now in his place, challenged me about my attitudes to Europe and subsidiarity. I want scrutiny and accountability. I want things to be examined because, ultimately, I want the best European regulations and legislation, just as I want the best legislation here.

I also want to consider bureaucracies, whether based in Brussels, London or elsewhere. That must be our mission. To some extent, the Government have embarked on that course. I should like them to go faster and I am coaxing and encouraging them to do that. At the end of the Parliament, I hope that they will be able to look back with pride at the fact that they substantially shifted the balance and loaded the dice perhaps a little more in favour of this legislature.

The Queen's Speech rightly refers to the enlargement of NATO and the European Union. In the discussion of the Queen's Speech 10 years ago, John Major specifically said that he hoped that Poland would join

[Andrew Mackinlay]

the European Union in 10 years. Some slippage has occurred, but the matter is important to me. Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic and all the states of central Europe were denied their right to join the club of free nations by the disfigurement of Europe through the Yalta agreements. When those countries join the European Union in a little more than a year, it will be the end of world war two for them. I therefore believe that enlargement is one of our most exciting missions. I shall be enormously pleased and proud when those countries join the European Union and benefit from everything that flows from membership, including opportunities for conflict resolution. NATO enlargement will also create a new and richer collective security. That is important and long overdue. I hope that I have been able to do my part in a small way in arguing for it.

In my maiden speech, I welcomed John Major's desire for Poland and other countries to join the European Union. I also said that it was wrong to argue for that and at the same time insist on visas for people from Poland. The requirement was abolished soon afterwards. However, we continue to insist on visas for people from Slovakia. We should remove that requirement. Visa systems do not prevent people who should not be here from getting into the country. However, they stop young students of English who are keen to improve their language skills coming here and subsequently returning to Bratislava or other places in central Europe.

People will always break the system and get through. However, it is wrong and ridiculous to impede people who are the seed corn and energy of expansion, and who will create a market in the wonderful countries of central Europe. It is also in our interest for them to master language skills and become familiar with the United Kingdom. I therefore urge Ministers to reflect on that.

It is time to bring to a head the question of our membership of the single currency. We should move to a referendum—and I would argue for a single currency. Even if the vote went the other way, at least the issue would be resolved for the time being. It will not go away, and as sure as night follows day we will eventually join the single currency. However, we should resolve the matter for now. I welcome the intimation in the Queen's Speech that we shall probably reach some resolution of this issue in the summer.

Let us consider international terrorism and Iraq. At the Labour party conference, I spoke in support of the Government and their stewardship of the Iraq crisis. Some of my friends were surprised, especially in view of my reputation for scrutinising the Government. I stress to them that when the Government are right, I shall proclaim that. Since the summer, the Government's skilful and courageous stance has meant that attitudes in the Bush Administration have shifted substantially from all the nonsense about regime change. They argued that they could go into Iraq simply on the basis of an "imminent threat" to the United States. We rightly said no to that and stressed that we need to buttress and support the United Nations and enhance its authority. That is vital. We are doing that, and we were pleasantly surprised by the recent unanimous resolution of the Security Council.

There is a great prize to be won. If Saddam allows the weapons inspectors unimpeded access, we will reinforce the authority of the United Nations and send a signal to other despots around the world, to those who seek to take on weapons of mass destruction, and to those who try to defy United Nations resolutions. It will help the world community to lean on Israel, which flouts United Nations resolutions, albeit not the chapter VII mandatory resolutions. A great deal is at stake but, uniquely, only the Labour Government could have made the contribution to our current position. We are entitled to say that.

When I was speaking to party members a few nights ago, I was surprised that one of my good friends believed that talk about the threats to London and elsewhere was propaganda. A few people in the House, in the media and in our constituencies do not understand the gravity of the situation and the nature of al-Qaeda and such organisations. Matters are grave. Of course, that view has to be balanced, and we must not be too alarmist. We also need to understand that weapons of mass destruction can be small, that they can lie in a cupboard or fridge and be procured and created in London. They do not have to be brought in. I have already mentioned the need to tighten security in our ports and I proposed establishing national ports police. I hope that the Government will consider that.

Mr. Don Foster: I agree with the hon. Gentleman about the issue's importance, but does he agree that the Government could do more by giving greater support to our local authorities on emergency planning? My local authority had a cut this year to £89,000, with which it must perform all the additional planning. There is an urgent need for more funding to support the work to which the hon. Gentleman referred.

Andrew Mackinlay: I agree; our emergency planning is deficient. I believed that before the immediate crisis. Prudent Governments should tackle the matter. Again, not only the current Government should be criticised. We have been rather sanguine about such matters for 25 years. Old vehicles have been mothballed and we must now beef up emergency planning and provision without causing alarm.

I want to consider Ireland. I listened carefully to my friend, the hon. Member for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley), who is focused on the matter. All hon. Members have sympathy for public servants who have borne the brunt of those 25 years, and bear the scars of losing loved ones and colleagues. We all hope that Northern Ireland will have a brighter future. None of us has easy solutions; there is no magic wand. However, the Government have done a great deal to bring about reconciliation.

Whatever the legislation in the Queen's Speech that will affect the Police Service of Northern Ireland, we must be sensitive about the reserve. It is a misnomer because the reserve consists of full-time, paid police employees. They are overwhelmingly of one religious grouping because that is the nature of things. However, they are also diligent, keen public servants. We cannot swiftly run them down—that is insensitive and not good policing. Whatever measures are devised, and at the same time as we implement the Patten proposals, those officers need reassurance that they will be treated

sympathetically. I appreciate that there must be an accelerated system of promotion, and that we need to create as soon as possible a more sensible system and a police force that better reflects the religious groupings in Northern Ireland. However, we must also consider those people who have borne the brunt for 25 years. The Northern Ireland police reserve is one such group. Insufficient deference has been given to these people.

I have enormous admiration for our colleagues who come from Northern Ireland constituencies, whatever their persuasions. They have difficulties because inevitably questions involving the constitution and security are paramount for them. There are many other issues that other Members raise, and because there is limited parliamentary time, limited slots and sometimes difficulty in catching the eye of the occupant of the Chair, comparable issues are not raised in relation to Northern Ireland. The opportunities are somewhat limited. During the period when we have direct rule, we should not return to the system which previously prevailed where we passed the equivalent of Acts of Parliament for Northern Ireland in an hour and a half by order. It would be much better if we included provisions for Northern Ireland when considering and enacting what I might call English legislation, rather than having a separate order for Northern Ireland being considered at a different time, with minimal scrutiny.

Some terrible outrages occur in Northern Ireland and the constitutional position is, obviously and inevitably, a matter of considerable debate, particularly in terms of Northern Ireland. Unfortunately, outside the United Kingdom people get an entirely wrong impression about Northern Ireland. I shall share something with the House. For the third summer running, I spent my summer holidays in Northern Ireland. When I tell colleagues, I see the look of surprise on their faces. I snap back and say, "It is the safest place in western Europe." In many respects it is. We should talk up Northern Ireland. We should refer to the great beauty of the glens of Antrim, of the banks of the Foyle, of the lakes of Fermanagh and of the Strangford lough with its rich and almost unique bird life.

I was disappointed when a quango did not select Belfast to be on the shortlist as one of the European cities of culture. That decision may well have been borne out of prejudice and ignorance of the rich culture of Northern Ireland, of the peaceful nature of the vast majority of a beautiful country and of the tremendous hospitality of the people. We should make it clear that Northern Ireland is a great place for holidays, that it is rich in culture and is a place where there are some tremendous people who are overwhelmingly of good will. We must recognise the conflict, the terrible loss and cost, the sacrifice and the outrages that occur. However, we must be mindful that Northern Ireland is a part of these isles where people from the United States and north America should feel very safe. That applies especially to people from Washington, who recently had to undergo the outrages of the snipers. "American visitors, you are safe in Northern Ireland," —we should say that also to the people of the Irish Republic and of south-east England. We should visit this important part of the British isles and talk it up.

6.33 pm

Peter Bottomley (Worthing, West): I welcome the speech of my right hon. Friend the Member for Wokingham (Mr. Redwood). Time flew by when I listened to his remarks. I welcome also the remarks of the hon. Member for Thurrock (Andrew Mackinlay); I echo what he said about Northern Ireland. It was disappointing to me that even when times were much more troubled it was possible to find an angler from Germany every 200 metres when it should have been possible to find an angler from the rest of Britain every 100 yards.

I remember taking my family for a drive round the whole of Ireland in 1971, when times were pretty rough. At one stage, we had apparently driven over a 600 lb bomb. We still had a marvellous time in Northern Ireland. There is great hospitality both north and south of the border.

I shall cover a fair amount of ground, but not at length. I pay tribute to councillors throughout our country. We do not spend enough time considering the difficulties that they have when changes or proposed changes to rate support grant or equivalent moneys for the police or for both have an impact on what councillors will do. I wondered what the cause was. For a time, I was a junior Minister involved in rate support grant exemplifications. During my time in government, I do not think that we saw the sort of attack on certain parts of the country that we are seeing now. Some of the attack may be the result of misunderstanding.

I have a letter from West Sussex county council, which points out that a change in possible fines for county councils for not unblocking beds may cost the county council £3 million to £4 million a year, when the resources needed to make it possible to move people on will not be available. That penalty may apply to each of the county councils in my area with social services responsibility.

There are other changes, such as the possible changes in police funding. At one extreme, these might mean that the Sussex police force, which covers both East and West Sussex, might lose £19 million or £32 million, whatever the figure may be. In the end, I do not think that the situation will be as bad as that.

West Sussex has by far the highest proportion of over-85s and a very high proportion of over-75s. In my constituency, nearly half the population is above retirement age. If the county is penalised on policing money, social services money, housing money and other local government funds, many people on low fixed incomes—there is not as much unemployment as there is in some other areas—will find themselves penalised in a way that requires an example. I use some figures from about a year ago.

In the Prime Minister's health authority area, fewer than one person in 100 were waiting for in-patient treatment for more than one year. In West Sussex, as in west Surrey, one person in 10 were waiting for more than a year. That is postcode discrimination.

We should argue for a movement of resources to areas where people are waiting the longest and where most people are waiting. Yet the funding seems to move the other way. The Government should come to West Sussex and think about why they still pursue a system of penalty.

[Peter Bottomley]

In 16 months, from towards the end of June 2001 to the end of October 2002, the Prime Minister made a number of official visits. Making allowances for some ambiguity, with some place names appearing in more than one county, I believe that the Prime Minister did not visit West Sussex, or for that matter East Sussex, Kent, Hampshire, Surrey, Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Hertfordshire, Dorset, Devon, Cornwall, Somerset, Shropshire, Staffordshire, Warwickshire, Leicestershire, Lincolnshire or Gloucestershire. I challenge each local newspaper or regional newspaper to ask whether the Prime Minister has made enough visits, or in some instances any visit, to its county. I will not get involved in whether the right hon. Gentleman went to Brighton for the TUC or Labour party conferences. He has certain duties that we understand. However, the only time when he went to the south coast was for matters party political or near party political. He needs to come down to the south coast more often.

The Prime Minister should understand that there are many who would benefit by some of the policies that are put forward by the Government, and possibly by some of the proposed legislation in the Queen's Speech. The right hon. Gentleman should understand also that many people have been penalised by the apparent ignorance of what conditions are like for many people on the south coast. Many of them are on relatively low pay and many others are on low fixed incomes. They are struggling hard.

When Government decisions require council tax to increase by 10 per cent., many people notice that. They are the people whom we should be serving the most. They are the old-time generation, my father's generation, who are living on the south coast. They worry about social security, policing and health services which mean it is necessary to wait. I will not produce a great list, but I am aware of a person who had to wait 12 months for a 20-minute hearing test at the local hospital. These things matter, and it is one of the reasons why I cherish having an individual constituency responsibility.

I move on to the Prime Minister's e-envoy. I refer to the electronic government person, probably about four or five years ago. For most of the past year I have been trying to find the Prime Minister's e-mail address. People would not tell me that he did not have one but they would not say what it was. We now discover that some time in the new year—that may mean the whole of 2003 or early in that year, given the ambiguity of language that comes out of No. 10—there will be an e-mail address for the Prime Minister. Those involved should be able to cope with the blizzard of e-mails because No. 10 receives 12,000 letters a week. If they can cope with that number of letters, they can cope with e-mails, which are rather easier to dispose of. I condemn those who advise the Prime Minister for ensuring that he remained one of the few people in government without an e-mail address.

The Foreign Secretary is in the same position. When a Member of Parliament wants to make urgent representations to the Foreign Office about a constituent—perhaps someone facing deportation or in trouble overseas—it is helpful to have an e-mail address for senior Ministers, and I hope that the Prime Minister will make it his business to ensure that every Minister has an e-mail address. It is all very well exhorting other people, but we and he should go further and set an example.

The Prime Minister's office has not commissioned any focus group research since June 2001. That is perfectly reasonable. The Department of Health was asked what research it had commissioned and whether it would identify the topics covered, who carried it out, the total cost, and whether the research would be published on the Department's website. The answer was that a table had been placed in the Library and that the Department's expenditure on focus group research could only be provided at disproportionate cost. I do not criticise that if it is true, because I do not wish to put the Department to disproportionate cost.

A Department should be able to state that any research carried out with public funds is published and that a summary, at least, is put on an accessible website. It was a rule when I was a junior Minister that if public money was spent on research, it was published, however embarrassing or boring it might be or however ill-considered its commissioning might have been. For the same reason, PhD theses should also be made available to the public.

The Prime Minister was asked what protocols existed that covered policy advisers able to direct Ministers or officials in Departments. The answer included this sentence:

"Policy advisers do not have powers of direction."—[*Official Report*, 6 November 2002; Vol. 392, c. 399W.]

Unless the Order in Council has changed, my belief is that Alastair Campbell and Jonathan Powell have the power to give direction. The response to that may be that they are not policy advisers but civil servants, but that does not cover the point of the question.

The Prime Minister should instruct those preparing answers on his behalf to give a full answer. The fact that no untruth has actually been told is not good enough. An example needs to be set throughout Government so that if it is possible to give fuller information, it should be given. If that question were to be answered after this speech, I would expect that it would include an extra paragraph saying that those people covered by Orders in Council were exceptions.

I ask my Front Benchers to ensure that we go into the next election saying that we will not have any Orders in Council that allow anyone who is not a Minister or a member of the permanent hierarchy to give instructions to civil servants. It is not right that those Orders in Council cover Alastair Campbell and Jonathan Powell, and I hope that there are no others about whom we have not been told.

It may amuse the House to learn that because of a rare slip in *Hansard*—a heading has been missed out—we do not have our attention drawn to the fact that officials do not give reports on junior Ministers to the Prime Minister, and that if they have a complaint to make they make it through the Cabinet Secretary. I mention that as some encouragement to the junior Ministers who are in their places.

Andrew Mackinlay: How did you get stuffed?

Peter Bottomley: The hon. Gentleman asks how I became a retired Minister. It was partly because I

volunteered and partly because I was doing such a marvellous job that the Prime Minister thought I should go.

My next point is about VAT on energy-saving materials. The Government's scope for action may be limited by the European Union, but that may be up for review. It is important to have a lower rate of VAT on materials that will prevent the wasting of energy—for many reasons, including price elasticity, the signal that it would send and the recognition that if we are to take global warming seriously, we must take seriously the reduction in the use of energy and the reduction of the pollution that accompanies the creation of energy. If we took some of the tax reliefs that are available to the power companies when they purchase plant that generates energy, we could better spend it on helping people to be warm and snug in their homes. It is normally those in lower income groups who are slowest to obtain energy-efficient boilers and insulation materials.

The Law Commission has produced many reports to which the Government have not responded. I remind the House that our law is a combination of the common law, the decisions of the higher courts and the statute law enacted or authorised by Parliament. The main areas in which the Law Commission works include trust and property law, criminal law, contract, tort, commercial law, the law of landlord and tenant and damages. If the Law Commission, after consultation, has produced a draft Bill which it believes would clarify the law or change it to make it more just, and if the Government do not act on that within a short space of time, they should be required to report in detail to the House. If the Law Commission puts forward a suggestion that, by general agreement, would make things fairer or change the judgments that courts make, we have a responsibility to demand of the Government that they give it a much higher priority.

Some of the issues facing the Law Commission may not sound enormously important to everyone, when they include, for example, shareholder remedies; business tenancies; aggravated, exemplary and restitutionary damages; liability for psychiatric illnesses; the rules against perpetuities, and excess accumulations. However, the Government's response on the Law Commission's recommendations on offences against the person is not adequate, because insufficient priority is given to them.

I ask that the Law Officers and the Prime Minister consider introducing a system that would require the relevant Departments to say explicitly what is happening. If the Department agrees with the recommendations, it should say so. If it thinks that there should be a second round of consultation, and therefore delay, it should say so. If the recommendations are to be kept for the third or fourth year of a Parliament, because they are not controversial, the relevant Department should say so. The Law Commission does the work, and we should not be left wondering what will happen next.

I do not know whether the Law Commission has addressed the reform of the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971. I return to a case that the House has considered in the past when it was proper to do so—when no court case was pending—and that is the Wintercomfort case. Ruth Wyner and John Brock were sent to prison in a prison system where 19,000 of the 70,000 population have been detected as using illegal drugs. Ruth Wyner worked as a counsellor in prison and had to agree to a level of confidentiality which, in her work running the project at Wintercomfort—a home for the destitute—got her sent to jail. She had a protocol on confidentiality under which she spoke in public about the threat of growing drug dealing, but the police with whom she was working were not told by other police that they were investigating drug dealing on or near her premises.

It is a scandal that Ministers did not intervene. They knew what had happened and they should have listened to homeless projects around the country. Ministers should realise now that the result of that use of section 8 of the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 was to change the sorts of people who could be dealt with by wet or dry shelters. If our homelessness projects, whether day or night centres, can cope only with the clean and the decent, or with those with sufficient self-control not to share or deal in drugs, and if the police will not co-operate in such cases, we will not find the volunteers, the professionals or the unpaid trustees who are willing to work together to help people lift themselves out of the misery of drugs that was described by the right hon. Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron) as affecting his area and far too many other areas.

I turn to the curious case of Mr. JW. Two of my constituents have been involved with business premises in Spain. I wrote a letter on their behalf to lawyers saying that my constituents had not received justice in terms of shareholdings, dividends and ownership. I copied that letter to the Foreign Secretary and the Spanish ambassador. I received no reply for several weeks, so I wrote again, including in my letter an assertion that Mr. JW had not told the truth to a court. The matter proceeded. He has now written to me, saying that he is considering suing me for defamation for communicating to my secretary what was put to me by my constituents, and for communicating the information that I gave to the Foreign Secretary and the Spanish ambassador.

I have experience of defamation proceedings. I have not paid a penny to a lawyer yet, although that may be due as much to luck as to merit, and I do not intend to start now. So I have told Mr. JW that I am sorry that he thinks my action has lowered him in the eyes of the Spanish ambassador and the Foreign Secretary. I have received a letter from one of Mr. JW's associates, saying, "Sorry about the information in the fax. It was not that he did not say something in court; he did." The word "not" was missing, which shows that the complications go round and round and round.I say to this man that if he thinks that getting at a Member of Parliament for getting a secretary to write a letter in some way defames the person, he had better find someone else to challenge. I am not inviting him to take me to court, but I can say, quite simply, that many people would be delighted to give evidence in court, which is just as privileged as making these remarks in the House.

I say to those who face inquiries from Members of Parliament on behalf of constituents, "Your best advice is to co-operate and give information openly. If there is some dispute over facts, just spell that out." Few of us here are pushovers for such a letter, which I could have taken the wrong way. I hope that I have not done so, but if I have, I intend to use every opportunity to get justice for my constituents.

6.51 pm

Jon Trickett (Hemsworth): I want to refer briefly to a number of points. First, legislation dealing with crime, antisocial behaviour and law and order is central to the Queen's Speech. It is clear to me and, I think, almost everybody that a consensus is emerging that our constituents who live in poverty can suffer most from crime and law and order problems and, therefore, that those on the left as well as those on the right in British politics ought to take these matters seriously. I welcome the Government's intention to deal with them through legislation, but many other things need to be done within the criminal justice system that do not require legislation, but which could help to restore a degree of faith in that system—a faith that, sadly, many of our citizens have lost.

I want to exemplify that statement by referring to my constituent, Mrs. June Harrison, whose husband, a coach driver, was tragically killed while driving on the correct side of the A638 in my constituency by a French lorry driver who was on the wrong side of the road. It was a great personal tragedy, as the House can imagine, and many hon. Members will have come across similar circumstances. What happened next contributed to the cynicism over criminal justice.

As the House would expect, the French lorry driver received hospital treatment paid for by British taxpayers as well as free legal aid and advice, which he was entitled to. Again, British taxpayers paid for that. At Pontefract magistrates court, he was fined £500 and received a six-point penalty on his licence. Many people might think that a low price to pay for killing a person with a wife and family and a reasonable future ahead of him, but that was the decision of the court.

Many people might disagree with the fine—indeed, June Harrison, the widow, feels that it is inappropriate—but my point is that, although magistrates courts levy many fines, many people do not pay. Recently, the Public Accounts Committee, of which I am a member, discussed the matter, and it is apparent that many people who are fined in a magistrates court simply fail to pay and that the criminal justice system does not cope very well with the non-payment of fines. It seems that foreign nationals can simply choose not to pay, and there is no process by which the fine can be collected.

Sadly, the driver in this case, Mr. Boulanger, decided to take advantage of the situation and refused to pay his fine, which it seems he was perfectly entitled to do. It is extraordinary that a French citizen can kill somebody in this country and receive free legal advice and hospital treatment—the process of co-operation across Europe works in those respects, so why should such a person not receive them?—yet a fine cannot be extracted from him. Furthermore, he has said from his home in France that he believes that my constituent's poor husband would not be dead if the British had only changed the side of the road on which they drive. Frankly, that is a disgraceful statement, but, as hon. Members can imagine, the fact that he has not paid the fine has caused grievous insult to the widow, to the community that I represent and to me.

Worse, the six points on that person's licence have no meaning whatever in France. It disturbs me that we have no criminal justice system whereby fines or punishments registered on a licence can have an effect in the rest of Europe. This man is plying his trade in France and earning money while my constituent, June Harrison, faces a sad loss and a life without her husband.

I have looked into the matter, and I think that the system by which magistrates courts issue fines and that by which European sister countries co-operate need to be reviewed carefully to avoid bringing the criminal justice system into disrepute. I have corresponded with my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on the matter and I hope that we shall pay attention to such apparently small details somewhere in the raft of legislation that is to come before us. Those small details can do enormous damage to the reputation of the criminal justice system and, indeed, to the broader European project.

I wish to refer briefly to other matters in the Queen's Speech, including one mentioned by my right hon. Friend the Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron). In many mining communities such as those that I represent the National Coal Board originally provided social housing. Some time ago, it was decided to privatise that housing. Some people bought their properties with savings or by taking out mortgages, but many of the houses were disposed of to so-called social landlords such as housing associations and, in many cases, to private landlords.

In the communities that I represent, there has been a process of abandonment—not of the odd house, but of whole villages. The private landlords and, to some extent, the so-called social landlords have put in tenants who, frankly, are inappropriate in small, enclosed communities in mining villages such as Fitzwilliam, South Elmsall, Hemsworth and Featherstone. There was a flight from the villages of the original tenants—the mining families—and the people left behind are those who bought their own house, who form a small minority. I could name five villages that have been totally abandoned, and my communities are in a deplorable situation. I have comments to make on that.

The Queen's Speech contains a proposal to license private landlords in certain areas. I strongly welcome that legislation, which I shall follow with interest, and I hope that early implementation is achieved. There are many good private landlords, by the way, and I do not wish to say that they all operate inappropriately, but it is clear to me that licensing and control are imperative in certain areas if we are to stop the continuing collapse of communities.

One can visit some communities almost any day of the week and see furniture vans and people who are moving away. I fear for the future of the people who are left behind and their children. After seeing some of those communities, it is hard to believe that this is England in the 21st century. Children are growing up facing a future represented by abandoned villages, which is an appalling indictment of the situation in which people find themselves.

I know of the commitment to economic stability and full employment, but in some of my communities the regeneration initiated by the Government has not begun. The process has not penetrated there. Former mining communities continue to collapse, and we urgently need further help. Economic stability is not enough for us; action must be properly targeted. There

is talk of overheating of the economy elsewhere, but my communities are collapsing. We need strategic action, such as the action taken in south Kirkby, a former colliery site. The Government found £3 million to recover the land and deal with the poisoning that was left when the mine closed. The site is now ready for redevelopment, but we need further support from the Government.

Action has also been taken at Green lane in Featherstone. I am sure that the Government know of our need for more regeneration, because Ministers have visited my community to look at the problems. I have mentioned housing problems and the collapse of villages. We do not need just action to deal with housing, though; we need social and economic community regeneration.

According to the Queen's Speech, a Bill will be introduced to ensure that local authorities support older people awaiting discharge from a hospital. Bed blocking prevents local authorities and other agencies from looking after the elderly. It would obviously be better for elderly people not to be in acute hospitals—better for their welfare, and better because acute hospitals should be dealing with acute medical problems.

A big private finance initiative project is in progress in my area to reconstruct two hospitals, one in Pontefract and one at Pinderfields in Wakefield. That project depends on what is described as intermediate care. We are short of 200 beds, which can be provided only by the local authority. I think that the authority will welcome the duties that are bound to be imposed on it, but the fact remains that while it is all right to legislate for the council to be an enabler in this context, the problem is one of resources. The PFI project cannot succeed in rebuilding hospitals unless someone provides for the elderly people who are currently—and inappropriately—being cared for in acute hospitals. I am troubled about the project, and about the proposed Bill. Resources must accompany the legislation.

I am proud that the Government have made one of their flagships the proposal to invest heavily in public services. Those on the left of British politics firmly believe in public service provision. I am not one of those who believe that the status quo is defensible: it is clear that many of our public services are hierarchic, involving tiers of management that are inappropriate and would not exist in the private sector, and it is also clear that on occasion the needs of consumers are not responded to. I welcome the idea that investment and reform should go together.

The Government talk of devolving power, and the Queen's Speech proposes a change in the status of hospitals. We must not confuse two separate principles, uniformity and universality. Public service provision has been far too uniform, and I do not object to, for example, the idea of a post-comprehensive era in education or that of more freedom for hospitals. Uniformity is the enemy of customer-friendliness and help for consumers, and I approve of any measure that would reduce it. Many Members may, like me, have been councillors before they were elected to this place. On housing estates that I knew, front doors had to be painted red, green or blue. Uniformity of that kind went a long time ago, but uniformity in public services is still a problem.

I fear, however, that our proposals to abolish uniformity may undermine the principle of universality—and the principle of a universal service, equally available to all, must not be undermined. I am worried, for instance, about the proposal to allow hospitals that are providing excellent services to borrow more money. That principle of universality, surely, depends on equal access for all to excellent provision. I fear that if funds follow excellence in management there will be two levels of management. I hope very much that neither the Prime Minister nor any other Minister intends to undermine the universality principle in that way, as it is not a course that I could easily follow—although, as I have said, I have no problem with the abolition of uniformity.

7.6 pm

Tony Baldry (Banbury): Much of today's debate has concerned the need to improve public services. Indeed, nothing is more important than a more effective police; a criminal justice system that works; good teachers and improved education; and well-motivated and well-rewarded NHS staff and a better health service. The only difficulty is this: we hear the same claims from the Government every year.

In last year's Queen's Speech, the Government trumpeted

"the most fundamental reform of public services for many years".

I suspect that if all those present were asked to name a supposed flagship Bill produced in the last Session, many of us would have difficulty in doing so. Indeed, I doubt that many Ministers could name a Bill that had made a difference. One year on, I do not think that last year's legislation has brought much change to my constituents and others in north Oxfordshire.

Every year we read the pre-Gracious Speech hype in the Sunday newspapers, forecasting great reform and great improvements. The Prime Minister was at it again over the weekend, saying

"We need a new, simpler and tougher approach to anti-social behaviour. It is petty crime and public nuisance that causes so much distress to people; vandalism, graffiti, low-level aggression and violence".

I agree, but the Government have had an opportunity to deal with that. Indeed, they have already introduced a number of criminal justice Bills since taking office. The problem is that those Bills have not worked. It has been all posturing and no delivery.

I suspect that I am not untypical, and barely a day passes without my being approached by a constituent telling me of antisocial behaviour suffered by him or her, and his or her family, at the hands of mindless people. Only this morning I received an e-mail from a constituent, telling me:

"Tuesday night was a total nightmare. A continuous barrage of sound louder than shotguns, of which I have had a lot of experience."

A little while ago, a constituent in Bicester wrote to me to tell me:

"The situation here is quiet, but as I stated in my last letter I believe the gang have only moved on to another part of our community to get their fun".

That is in rural north Oxfordshire, not some inner-city area.

[Tony Baldry]

I do not suppose that I am alone among hon. Members in recalling at least one instance of a different antisocial crime affecting a different family in a different street on each different day in my constituency. A youth in my constituency has committed so many crimes and jumped bail so frequently that it would make the average supermarket shopping receipt look short.

I took that up with Ministers. The Lord Chancellor's Department said:

"Dealing with juvenile crime has been one of the Government's top priorities . . .the aim is a system in which the response to offending is swift, consistent and effective, which engages young people and their parents much more in . . . social responsibilities".

Likewise, the Home Office said:

"We have also undertaken significant work across the Criminal Justice System to reduce unnecessary delays from arrest to sentence for persistent young offenders."

All that seems amazingly similar to the sentiments expressed by the Prime Minister ahead of the Queen's Speech, so one has to wonder what the Government have been doing in all the years since they came to office. Little has changed over the past years with respect to antisocial behaviour and I—and I am sure many others—are sceptical about whether much will change over the coming year. Why is that? It is simply because the measures announced today are either old measures dressed up as new measures or proposals that are more concerned with berating the police over tackling antisocial crime than with dealing with the yobs who commit such crime.

I understand that the Prime Minister is frustrated at the failure of the police, courts and councils to use existing powers to curb antisocial behaviour, but let me explain why that may be. One of the earlier trumpeted measures to deal with antisocial behaviour was the introduction of antisocial behaviour orders. That was what was going to sort out young yobs on housing estates who make elderly people's lives a misery by persistent low-level antisocial behaviour. The Government introduced a Bill to introduce the orders. So far, Cherwell district council in my constituency has managed to get just one antisocial behaviour order and that took over a year. It was subjected to delays, red tape and obstruction by the individual, not surprisingly, on whom the order was going to be served.

If it takes a district council over a year to get a single antisocial behaviour order, it gives rise to the question whether we are not seeing a certain amount of gimmickry? Would it not be better for the Government to look at the measures that they have already introduced and to ensure that they are effective, rather than trying to give the impression that they are doing something about crime by producing more and more Bills and putting them on to the statute book?

I come to the police and the courts. We have in the Gracious Speech a Bill that seeks to assist victims of crime by reducing the rights of defendants. I suspect that the measure will be opposed by almost every organisation involved in English law. That Liberty, the Legal Action Group, the Criminal Bar Association and the Bar Council have issued a joint statement against the proposed changes to the criminal justice system—it is the first time, as a barrister, that I can remember a joint statement bringing organisations such as Liberty and the Criminal Bar Association together—is a clear indictment of the Bill.

I do not believe that people in my constituency are looking to be treated as the victims in court. They do not want to go to court at all. They do not want to be victims in the first place. The best way of ensuring that is through the higher visibility of police officers on the street.

Last night, in Banbury, I spoke at the 184th dinner of the Neithrop Association for the Protection of Property. As hon. Members can see by virtue of the fact that it was its 184th dinner, that organisation has been going for a considerable time. It came into being before the introduction of the police service as we know it today. I suppose that 200 people were present from all walks of commercial, business and retail life in Banbury. I did not speak for long but the loudest cheers I got were when I said that we needed to see more police officers on the streets of Banbury. I suspect that the vast majority of people do not want the Government to introduce new gimmicks of on-the-spot fines for people who drop chewing gum. They want to see and have the comfort of knowing that more police officers are on the street.

Andrew Mackinlay: Why does the hon. Gentleman think that the two are mutually exclusive? He wants more policemen on the beat. There cannot be an hon. Member who would not sign up to that. These are innovative, experimental ideas. I do not see why the Government should be ashamed to complement officers on the beat by trying these other measures. It is common sense. It is laudable.

Tony Baldry: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman because I clearly have not been sufficiently clear and he has given me the opportunity to clarify my remarks. My complaint is that often we have gimmickry dressed up as policy. Much of it distracts people from the real problem. In my patch, the real problem with regard to law and order is insufficient police officers.

In the Thames Valley area, two police officers may live next door but the one who works for the Metropolitan police gets free transport and is paid £6,000 a year more. It is hardly surprising that Thames Valley is bleeding police officers as they move either to the Metropolitan area where they get paid more or to forces such as Lincolnshire where the housing costs are considerably less and they can buy a lot more with what they earn.

Whether it is a statistical quirk or a problem with the funding arrangements, the simple fact is that, next year, the amount that Thames Valley police will receive from the Government is a staggering £77 million below the average for all other police forces, which puts further severe strains on the force. Indeed, I think that, just to stand still next year, Thames Valley police authority will need a 30 per cent. increase in its portion of the council allocation. It is losing out substantially in the amount of money that it receives from central Government.

Before they have more legislation, more criminal justice Bills and Acts and more gimmicks, people in my constituency, in Oxfordshire and indeed throughout the Thames valley would like a properly funded well-recruited police force that has a chance of retaining

police officers. Too many of the police officers on the street at the moment are recent recruits; although they are excellent that is grossly unfair on them and on everyone else.

Brian White: Is the hon. Gentleman saying that things such as the restorative justice project, which Thames Valley police pioneered, should not be taken up by the Government and that we should rely simply on the tired rhetoric that he is coming out with?

Tony Baldry: I have no complaints against Thames Valley police. We have been fortunate in having a succession of extremely good, innovative chief constables. The present chief constable is in that mould but whatever initiatives the police take on restorative justice or any other area of policy will be as nought if, as often happens, there are fewer than four police officers on duty in the whole of Banbury and all the surrounding villages on a Saturday evening. That situation would be unacceptable in anyone's constituency.

There is also a problem with the Court Service. The Government are understandably concerned about the length of time it takes for cases to come to court. The chief executive of Thames Valley court service, which is based in Bicester, recently wrote to me expressing deep concern that more than 50 staff had left over the past six months, which had led to the cancellation of more than 200 trials. He described how

"urgent action is necessary. We cannot rely on the goodwill of our remaining staff for much longer".

I suspect that the solution to north Oxfordshire's Court Service problem is not dissimilar to that of many of those working in the public services in and around the Thames valley. The staff need to be competitively paid. Otherwise, they will look for more lucrative jobs.

I agree with the hon. Member for Thurrock (Andrew Mackinlay) on one issue. A debate on the Queen's Speech is not just about those measures that are in it, but about those measures that have been left out. Like the hon. Gentleman, I was disappointed that there was no Bill on corporate manslaughter. That would not be a gimmick. The Labour party has made that an election pledge not once, but twice; at both of the last two general elections. Omitting the Bill from the Queen's Speech is very much letting down employees and their families.

I wish to refer to the tragic case of my constituent Simon Jones, who was brutally killed. He was a student at Sussex university and had to work during the vacation to earn some money. He went to Shoreham docks and was killed on his first day in tragic circumstances. I do not use the word glibly, but in many ways it has destroyed the lives of his parents and family.

I went to the Old Bailey to watch the trial of the chairman of the company concerned. Under our present law, it is almost impossible to get a conviction against an individual director or person responsible, and the company was fined a pretty derisory amount. The Government have been consulting for a long time on the issue and they had almost got to a draft Bill. I think that they simply backed away in the face of pressure from employers.

As a traditional Conservative, I have always believed that it is right that the state should intervene in these matters. Indeed, most of the early legislation on factories was introduced by Disraeli's Governments. It seems to me that the state has a duty to try to ensure that people have a safe place to work. Our record on deaths at work in this country is appalling and some sectors of industry have particularly poor records. I know that the Health and Safety Executive does a good job, but if directors—I speak as a director of a number of companies, as anyone who consults the Register will see—knew that they stood in peril of losing their freedom if they did not ensure that their work force had, so far as is possible, a safe place of work, it would substantially reduce the death rate of people at work in this country.

I hope that Labour Back Benchers will take this matter up with the Government because it is a dereliction of duty that such a Bill is not in the Gracious Speech. One can only hope that a Member will propose a private Member's Bill on the subject, or that the Government will see the need for such a Bill on a future occasion. The Government have got that one wrong.

The other parts of the public services about which we are concerned are our hospitals and schools. It gives me no pleasure to report that Oxfordshire has one of the worst-rated hospitals in the country, the Oxford Radcliffe hospital, which received only one star last year and, despite the hard work of its staff, still has only one star out of three under the Government's own ratings. That is not the fault of the staff working there. There is a critical shortage of staff in the NHS in Oxfordshire. A recent count revealed that of the 1,250 nursing posts at the Oxford Radcliffe NHS trust, 400 were vacant. I suspect that a similar number is filled by nurses from overseas—excellent nurses from the Philippines and elsewhere who by definition are temporary and will not be in this country for long. We have a critical problem.

The hospital needs more nurses and staff and—like most of the NHS, I suspect—fewer bureaucrats. I understand that for every bed in the NHS, there is an NHS manager somewhere. We must not focus on new legislation. I am not quite sure what foundation hospitals will do; I suspect that they will not do much to create nurses for the Oxford Radcliffe or the Horton hospital. Even if the Oxford Radcliffe and the Horton hospital could recruit a full complement of nurses, we could not afford to pay them, and our ability to do so will be further eroded by the Government-imposed underfunding of the budgets. There is little in the Queen's Speech that will help to address this adverse balance.

The state of Oxfordshire's hospitals is compounded by serious reductions in Oxfordshire county council's social services budget. Oxfordshire social services has for the past three years been getting a raw deal from Whitehall. Milton Keynes, which is almost next door, gets nearly a fifth more investment than Oxfordshire from central Government; yet, clearly, the cost of living, staff costs and care costs are not dissimilar.

Last week, I went to No. 10 Downing street with a constituent called Geoff Watts, whose elderly married parents—both in their eighties and in need of care—had been put in separate nursing homes, some distance apart. That was an appalling situation; a bit like going back to the days of the workhouse, where men and women were separated. That occurred simply because Oxfordshire county council can only afford to get two new people into residential care each week. It was a

[Tony Baldry]

complete disgrace and a tragedy that they should have been in those circumstances and that the county council did not have the funds to get them into the care home together. Until they were reunited last week, it was a desperately tragic situation. Unfortunately, it was not unprecedented in Oxfordshire.

My hon. Friend the Member for Worthing, West (Peter Bottomley) said that the Prime Minister did not visit large parts of the country, and I agree. I think it would be a good thing and I would welcome more Ministers visiting Oxfordshire. Sometimes there is a perception that the home counties such as Oxfordshire are all dreaming spires and leafy roads. That is not the case. Many parts of my constituency have areas of considerable social need. As a result of the Government's recent consultation on redistributing local government grants, Oxfordshire county council faces either a 32 per cent. council tax rise or a £43 million cut to its budget.

Even if the Government introduce a complex series of floors and ceilings to dampen any such loss, it is almost certain that elderly care will continue to be under-resourced, that youth groups will be under threat and that foster care will lose its foundation. Even if the final option chosen by the Government next month is less severe than some of us have feared, Oxfordshire will not see fairer funding for its public services. That makes a complete mockery of proposed legislation on community care discharge. The hon. Member for Hemsworth (Jon Trickett) said that community care discharge would work effectively if local authorities and social services had the funding to take on that responsibility.

Over the last couple of years, Oxfordshire has substantially contracted the support it can give to elderly people living in the community. If the Government do not commit the funds to local authorities such as Oxfordshire county council, any legislation on community care discharge will be a mockery.

These are the sorts of thing about which people in north Oxfordshire are concerned—properly funded public services. They are not particularly concerned about local government gimmicks to do with the possibility of regional assemblies.

Banbury has absolutely nothing in common with Brighton. Henley has nothing in common with Hove. Witney has nothing in common with Worthing. The idea that the south-east is a homogeneous entity, which can be brought together in a regional assembly—*[Laughter.]* Quite rightly, Labour Members laugh at even the possibility of Banbury's having anything to do with Brighton. The ludicrousness of it is that three miles to the north is Northamptonshire, technically in the east midlands, while three miles in the other direction is Stratford, technically in the west midlands. My constituents want to have decent public services, delivered locally by local authorities that they know and understand. They understand the district council and the county council, and they will see the desire to have regional assemblies taking powers away from their district and their county as yet another gimmick and a distraction. No one that I have come across in my patch wants a regional assembly.

I ask myself, what is there in this Queen's Speech that speaks to the condition of those I am privileged to represent in Parliament? The answer is, very little. Yes, they want decent public services, but more specifically they want more police officers on the street; a decently funded, well-recruited national health service; and properly funded schools and social services. They do not want the Government tinkering—or, more than tinkering, messing about with—the local government financing formula, taking money from the south and, I am bound to say, giving it to their friends in the north. Those are the critical issues for people in Oxfordshire. Some will be concerned that the Government have dodged, and run away from, difficult issues such as corporate manslaughter.

Finally, I wish to pick up something that the hon. Member for Thurrock said. I would be more impressed by the Government's attempts at pre-legislative scrutiny if the Bills listed to be subjected to such scrutiny were not so excruciatingly boring that no human being—with the exception of someone who has a really sad life, reading draft Bills in bed at night—would want to read them.

I serve on the Select Committee on International Development, which I am fortunate enough to chair. The hon. Member for Thurrock serves on the Select Committee on Foreign Affairs. We, and the Defence Committee and the Trade and Industry Committee, came together in the Quadripartite Committee, and in the last Parliament we put forward, as four senior Select Committees of the House, a very modest suggestion that, following the Government's proposal for an ethical foreign policy, it would be good if there could be prior scrutiny, by Select Committees of the House, of key defence sales licensing decisions. That suggestion, if I may use the expression, got two fingers from the Government. What indication is there that if the Government offer Select Committees prior scrutiny on such issues, they will take any notice of the results? I doubt very much whether allowing such scrutiny will make the legislative process much better, but it gives the impression that the Government are doing something. They will be able to say that they can rush their Bills through the House much more quickly because we have all had the opportunity to read the Bills in draft. I suspect that it will be yet another way in which the rights of Members of Parliament will strangely and perversely be eroded rather than enhanced.

There is very little about this Queen's Speech that gives me any cause for optimism and a lot that gives me considerable cause for concern.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. The average length of speeches from the Back Benches is now running at about 22 minutes. Unless it reduces, not everyone who is seeking to catch my eye will be fortunate this day.

7.34 pm

Mr. Ken Purchase (Wolverhampton, North-East): It is always a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry), whose speeches are always thoughtful, sometimes provocative and always combined with a caring persona.

May I have permission to make an apology to the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker? During the Adjournment debate secured by the hon. Member for Southend, West (Mr. Amess) last Wednesday, I made an intervention and failed to declare a registered interest that I feel that I should have declared. The very next morning I wrote to the Speaker's Office, and sought advice. Apparently, there is no procedure for making an apology in those circumstances. Although my apology is short, it is none the less sincere for that.

I preface my remarks on the Government's programme by saying that it would be extremely helpful if Back-Bench Members could have some understanding of whether the convention of not trailing the Budget also applies to the Queen's Speech. I make no particular complaint at this point, except that it does pretty well hose off Back-Bench Members when everything is spread out over the weekend's papers and we have had little or no briefing on the subject matter that might well form the core of the Queen's Speech. I hope that Ministers will convey that message. It would be helpful for us to know, one way or the other. Either it is a free market or there is a properly organised and recognised convention that we do not have all that material trailed in the media in the weekend before the speech—sometimes earlier.

The Queen's Speech mentioned some initiatives that I should particularly like to see come to fruition as legislation in the coming year. Housing has already occupied some of Members' time this afternoon—more specifically, the idea that we may have a seller's pack. I hope that there will also be a recognition that the age-old practice of gazumping has returned and that it needs to be addressed, perhaps in the way that Scottish law does. It is a dreadful experience when people who believe that they have a deal, in many cases for their very first home, discover a few days—even hours—later that they have been gazumped, to use the terminology, and are no longer able to purchase the house that they felt was theirs. When we scrutinise the draft Bill for housing, we should spend some time considering how we might prevent that phenomenon of some years back from reappearing ever again on the English housing scene, and hopefully match the experience of Scottish buyers.

I welcome the proposed reductions in business rates—in some cases, I understand, of up to 50 per cent.—for small companies. As I have a particular interest in small businesses, I am anxious to see what that Bill brings in its substantive form, but I believe that this will be a welcome measure, should we bring it to fruition.

The licensing Bill brings some sense and reason to a difficult and confused matter, but I stress especially strongly the need to recognise that public houses and other licensed premises in urban areas can cause more trouble than they will ever be worth, in the form of the nuisance caused by some of their customers leaving the public house not just at closing time but at other hours during the evening. We should welcome rationalisation of the legislation, but we need to pay keen attention to the effects that it may have on our communities.

I note with disappointment that, despite the need to revisit workers' legislation, there is no proposal so far to look again at the question of companies confiding in their work force when redundancies are looming. Very often, we read in the press about redundancies to be made in our constituencies without the workers concerned having been informed. That is exceedingly distressing for people who are made redundant, and, even for those who are part of a large company, not knowing who is to be made redundant is extremely stressful. I hope that we will revisit the question of rights at work, and recognise the importance of consulting with workers, not just on redundancy or bad news but on the aspirations for the company. That will bring the best out of our work force and aid the development of our economy—on which we all depend—the fruits of which we all hope to share.

On education, I am concerned that we may be moving towards seeing the end of the liberal post-war consensus on the way forward in secondary education. That process is presented to us as the opportunity, through choice, for diversity. Another way of describing that—from what I understand, read and try to absorb in discussions—is atomisation. That involves special schools, religious schools, city colleges, academies, and specialising in particular matters. If a school specialises—perhaps in a science or an art—it needs specialist teachers. If a specialist teacher is put in a particular school, however, that robs another school of the opportunity of learning and taking advantage of what that teacher has to offer.

The argument that was always used in the Labour party about grammar schools applies equally in this regard: if all the academically brightest children at the age of 11 are put in one, two or three schools in a borough, it is likely that teachers who specialise in A-level studies will be attracted to those schools, and will not therefore teach in secondary modern schools. We cannot claim to have had a comprehensive education system in England while we have had selection at 11, and, in some places, at 13. That simply does not work.

Before we go further down this road, I want to see some research, using enumeration districts, on where the achievers are. Instead of finding that grammar schools come near the top in terms of school results, we would find very different results by looking at where the boys and girls who end up at grammar schools come from. We would find a concentration in one school to the detriment of other schools. That is not the way forward for a modern nation. It was tried in the 19th century, and was reinforced by the Haddow report in the 20th century, and the so-called three-legged approach to education: the grammar school, the technical school and the secondary school. Is that different from what a famous philosopher referred to as men of gold, silver, lead? I think not. Exactly the same philosophy has brought us to the idea of having specialist schools that excel in one subject. What will that demonstrate about the quality and the breadth of the education being offered to young people who are to be part of making Britain strong and developing our economy in the 21st century? That is a considerable problem.

It is well known that, despite the sad efforts of a particular adviser, the Department for Education and Skills is aghast at the idea of bringing more religious schools on-stream. I am not knocking existing religious schools, but adding to them would replicate in our communities the problem that exists in Northern Ireland, where one religious group is deliberately separated from another. How are young people to grow up to respect one another in that way? A saddo—I

[Mr. Ken Purchase]

cannot describe him as anything else—has put forward the idea, and I do not believe that the Department has any time for it at all. The quicker that it is dropped the better. We need proper high-quality education for all our young people. That is what they deserve, and that is what they ought to get.

I understand that we are bringing forward plans to widen access to universities, and I wonder whether I may interpret the idea of wider access differently. It may be a guise under which we introduce a more elitist system with top-up fees. I make no apologise for returning to this issue, as I do not believe in it. It is common sense that those who aspire to and get a good education get a good job and pay more tax. That is right and how it should be. I do not mind if all of those people—100,000 or so—paid a little more tax. That might reflect the needs of the universities a little better, and I accept that the universities need more money and that more young people should be able to develop their education to the point at which they make a bigger and better contribution to the economy and to the development of the nation.

The way to do that, however, is not to say to those who have, "You shall have more." The fact is that those who have money to spend—perhaps 10,000, 15,000 or 20,000 people—on that kind of education will flock towards those institutions where they think that their children will get a better education than otherwise, and they will pay for it. Those universities will attract more resources, which will widen the gap again. The way for any party in a modern democracy to meet its education needs is to pay for them directly by taxation, and to reclaim that tax in the lifetime of all of us go to work, with those of us who earn most paying most. That is the modern way, not the old-fashioned way.

The Government secured the passage of the Enterprise Act 2002 at the last gasp in the previous Session, which was an important milestone. The hon. Member for Banbury, who is no longer in his place, asked if anything would make a difference, and I believe that the Enterprise Act will do so. More importantly, there may be time, even in this Session, to pass a new Companies Act. There is little question that a great deal of rationalisation is needed. If Members can see it this way, the Enterprise Act is about the big picture, prosperity and bringing forward new ideas and innovation, whereas a Companies Act deals with the little picture—the micro side. It is important that companies are not prevented from developing products and being entrepreneurial by company law that is out of date—a great deal of it dates back to the 19th century, and there has been no substantive modernisation of company law for many years. Bits and pieces have been added here and there, but that merely adds to the volume without providing clarity and cohesion in an area of law that is vital to the prosperity of this country.

A White Paper has been issued, and there has been much consultation in recent months, but I want to pick up on one issue: submitting accounts for small and medium-sized companies. Companies have the right to submit abbreviated accounts. That amounts to a statement, a balance sheet, the accounting policies followed and conventions met. There are also full accounts if companies want them. They need to go to a bank or anywhere else for money, they will need to show that the company is sound in wind and limb and that everything is above board and going well.

If the full accounts have to be lodged, however, many small companies, with perhaps just two directors, will have to disclose salaries. People may say, "So what?", but people rightly have hang-ups about disclosing their salaries. Why do we need to know directors' salaries? If by way of the taxation system they have rendered to Caesar that which is Caesar's, what more do we or the taxman need to know? We certainly do not need to know how much directors in micro limited companies pay themselves.

More dangerously, such a disclosure would show a company how much of its business makes up the total business of a smaller company, so enabling it to put pressure on that company. If a company buys 50 per cent. of all its production from another company, that knowledge puts someone in a strong position to turn the screw to push prices down. It would be possible to make life pretty damned hard for a small company that is perhaps aspiring to be a bigger company. It could be strangled almost at birth. There is good reason not to deprive small and medium-sized companies of the right to submit abbreviated accounts. All that small companies need to produce is a balance sheet, profit and loss and a statement of accounting policies. That is quite sufficient.

Interest is chargeable on bad debts, but no one claims it. If someone says to a company, "Look. Three months have elapsed. You promised to pay in 30 days and I am entitled to charge you interest", a buyer at a larger company will say, "Oh, sure, we will pay. By the way, you need not bother putting in any tenders or estimates for further work. But we've enjoyed your company. Thank you very much. Off you go." A better way—I have proposed this before—is to put a kitemark on the accounts of large companies and to show the average number of days they take to pay their debts. If small companies know that a company pays in 30, 60 or 90 days, at least they know what they are getting into. That would be far better than the right to claim interest, which no one ever does because they know that it is on pain of never getting another job from that company. People who have worked in industry or run businesses know that what I am saying is true, and I hope that the Government listen to my suggestion.

Finally, whatever we do in this Session, it will have the benefit of the House of Commons reforms which were pioneered by my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House. I commend them to hon. Members.

7.54 pm

Sir Teddy Taylor (Rochford and Southend, East): Although we have heard excellent speeches, I agree with the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, North-East (Mr. Purchase) that it is unfortunate that everything in the Queen's Speech was announced beforehand. There was not a single surprise. Indeed, it is sad that Members only seem to be interested in what has been left out. I hope that the Government will ensure that the next time we walk to the House of Lords we will be excited and wondering what will emerge from the Queen's Speech.

I also agree with what the hon. Gentleman said about the need for research on selection in education. I suggest he starts in a place called Glasgow, where I spent many

years, which had five selective schools. The rest were comprehensives. As the Labour party was in charge, it abolished the selective schools. The hon. Gentleman should consider what has happened to education results since then. Instead of equality and opportunities for able children from working-class homes, we have a system of class segregation in education. In those areas where circumstances are good, the houses are big and the parents care, the results are good. In other areas, the results are appalling. Where there is low parental expectation, the child does not have a chance. I appreciate the sincerity of the hon. Gentleman's argument, but he should consider what happened in Glasgow and look at results there.

Three things in the Queen's Speech worry me a great deal. The first is the reference to regional government. I do not know why the Government are pursuing that unless it is because of the institutions that exist in the European Union for regional government representatives to meet each other at the Committee of the Regions. The Government are well aware that apart from the north of England, which thinks that it might get the extra cash that Scotland gets under the Barnett formula, no one wants regional government. I ask them to think about what it will do to our democracy. Frankly, what should worry us far more than how the parties are doing is the fact that people are switching off from the voting system. There was a 25 per cent. vote in the European elections—so 75 per cent. could not care less. In our national parliamentary elections, voting was again down by 10 per cent. It is nonsense to tell the average person that although the power of this place has been disappearing to Europe, we are going to divide up what remains between the regional assemblies and the House of Lords.

I hope that the Government will rethink that policy and ask themselves about the massive costs involved. People who are elected to regional assemblies will want secretaries and a great deal of expenditure to pay for researchers and offices. It is clear from what happened in Scotland what costs are involved. I hope that the Government will dump that policy.

The second policy that worries me is the introduction of unlimited licensing hours. I had the pleasure of speaking to a chief superintendent of police in Southend only two days ago. As a good public servant, he does not have views on public policy, but I got the clear impression that like most people in Southend he is very worried about the implications of unlimited licensing hours. Although I know that the Government want to go ahead with that policy, a middle course would be to make no changes unless a local council agrees to them. The local council in Southend or Tilbury might say that it does not want unlimited licensing hours, and it is right that that decision is left to local people. I fear that unlimited licensing hours will create a nightmare for residents who live in certain areas. It will also mean a serious problem of encouraging alcohol consumption when we should be thinking about trying to discourage it. The health implications of alcohol have never been taken as seriously as they should have been.

My third concern relates to the referendum on the single currency. I hope that the Government will go ahead with the referendum next June, irrespective of their assessment of the economic tests. The single currency would mark the end of Britain as an independent country. We would lose control of our economic policies. The issue is so significant that people should have the right to express their view whether the Government think that the opinion polls are right or not.

I also want to make a general comment on contributions by hon. Members and the Prime Minister in particular. Although all Governments tend to look on the brighter side in the Queen's Speech and say that things are going splendidly, I am concerned that by consistently arguing that public services are getting better, we are failing to face up to the problems and to do something about them. It is my impression that public services are becoming worse and more difficult to manage, and that the services are finding it harder to cope with their problems. That is not a political point because I do not think that that is necessarily the Government's fault.

Let me deal with housing. I have been an MP for a long time and have lived in my local community. I have never known the shortage of housing to be as serious as it is in Southend. It has also been a serious problem in Rochford for a considerable time. Yesterday, I had a meeting with the chief executive of the housing department. It is an excellent department, and although the Tories are in charge, I am not making a political point because it was also good when a Lib-Lab council controlled Southend. However, it is having a nightmare coping with a housing list of 2,000 and a constantly increasing number of homeless people.

This morning I spoke on the phone with a young lady with three children who is desperate to get accommodation. She is living in desperately overcrowded conditions with a relative, so she has to find somewhere. She cannot get private rented accommodation because in Southend, probably as in most areas, one cannot get a private rented property if one is on housing benefit. It is much easier for asylum seekers because they get money direct from the Government and payment tends to be more reliable. The young lady cannot get a house from the council because it has no properties available. Most importantly, she cannot even get bed-and-breakfast accommodation.

The council has access to the Palace hotel, which is neither a palace nor a hotel, where many homeless people are housed, but the situation is still very serious. The council is trying many solutions. It has a housing association, Estuary, which, we are told, is thinking of buying 100 properties to try to make more accommodation available. It is also promoting, through the social services department, a scheme to provide £1,000 to help people to get private rented accommodation in the hope that it will help to overcome the problem. Frankly, however, it is not helping. I am not trying to attack the Government, but the increased demand for housing is causing a desperately serious problem that is becoming a nightmare, and unless we recognise that, we will not look for the solution.

I am afraid that the same is true of the health service. I know that the Government constantly produce figures to show us that things are getting better, but the impression that I gain from Southend is that problems are getting worse. This morning I phoned the hospital about a person, whom I know well, who has a heart problem. He wanted to inquire how long it would be

[Sir Teddy Taylor]

before he will have an angiogram. Those who know medicine will know that people are sent for tests, then a consultant writes them a letter and after that they have an angiogram. In Southend, the waiting time for that procedure is one year; last year, it was six months. Is it fair and reasonable, in a national health service, that someone who may have a serious problem with his heart waits a year for a test?

We are told that services are expanding. This morning I also spoke to an old lady whose husband needs chiropody for his toenails. That used to be available on the health service, but now they have to pay £16. I appreciate that people in the health service work very hard to try to help the general public, but the plain fact is that the increase in demand is such that the service is having much greater problems, and things are getting worse.

Social services have a major problem with funding. We know, for example, that children who need special care are living longer, so more care is needed. Yesterday, I asked the head of the social services department what he would do if the Government say that a patient is blocking a bed and social services are not providing them with a home, so the department will be fined. He said, "What can we do? We are already overspending. If we have to spend money in that way, it will make a difficult situation impossible."

Andrew Mackinlay: I am listening with bated breath to every word that the hon. Gentleman is saying about the housing shortage and problems in health and social services. I am awaiting his solution. He has not explained how the Government can provide homes when the housing stock has been sold. How would he fund the rapacious demand for health and social services? He criticises, but he is under an obligation to say how he would wave a magic wand to resolve the situation.

Sir Teddy Taylor: I am simply trying to get across the basic point that unless we accept that public services are now a major problem, we will not look for solutions. If the hon. Gentleman is looking for solutions, I will give him a cheque for £1.3 million and see what he can do with it. I know that because he is a kind, good person, he would spend it on the community and try to help the elderly and disabled. If he considers that every hour, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, we send that amount to the European Union, and a massive part of that is spent on dumping and destroying food, he will see that that is one way to get a lot of money.

The asylum seeker situation is certainly getting worse. I shall mention just one case that I know very well, which is that of a man who has been making various appeals for nine years. He came here as an asylum seeker from a terrible place called Turkey. I am not sure where that is but he said that he was scared to go back. For nine years, he has been making appeals, using public funds, under a variety of legislation. The asylum seeker problem is affecting the good race relations that have always existed in Southend. We have two mosques, and we have always had happy race relations, but since the asylum seeker problem has grown, relations are worsening. Something has to be done about the multitude of appeals, a vast number of which are made possible by the European convention. The Government should ask themselves what is the advantage of the European convention, bearing it in mind that we could bow out of it if we wanted to.

Traffic congestion in Southend is getting infinitely worse. It is a lovely place to live but many problems are getting worse. I told the council that I hope it will tell the Government that it will not agree to one additional house until the Government agree to a ring road to make life more tolerable for the people of Shoeburyness.

Andrew Mackinlay: You just said you wanted more houses.

Mr. Deputy Speaker : Order. Let us try to maintain the proper rules of debate. I appeal to the hon. Member for Thurrock (Andrew Mackinlay) not to make sedentary interventions.

Sir Teddy Taylor: I am desperately trying to keep my speech short because I know that there is a shortage of time, and much as I admire the hon. Gentleman, I will take no more interventions.

I spoke also this morning—I had a lot of phone calls this morning—to someone who wanted admission to my local comprehensive school, Cecil Jones. When I contacted the school, it said that it has a waiting list of 100 people. The next comprehensive school, Shoeburyness, is also packed full. The Government are more likely to find a solution if, instead of trying to pretend that things are getting better and services are improving, they accept the seriousness of the situation. Hon. Members should not think for a minute that I am saying that it is all the Government's fault—far from it. However, it is the Government's job to try to resolve problems, not to make things worse by pretending that they are better.

On a final point, I was disappointed by what the Prime Minister said about the European Union, particularly his reference to Britain having to become more and more involved in that organisation, which has not done a great deal of good for our community. I simply ask those who share the Prime Minister's view what has happened to the two countries which decided not to join the European Union?

I went to Europe; there were referendums in a place called Switzerland and a place called Norway. Both were told that disaster faced them if they did not join the EU, but both decided not to. Those two countries have the highest living standards, the lowest unemployment and the greatest volume of democracy in Europe today. Instead of being a disaster, that decision has been very good for those countries. I hope that, rather than becoming more involved, the Government will think carefully.

The crucial thing is telling the truth. If we tell the truth about the state of social services, we will have a better chance of resolving the problems. Instead of trying to pretend that things are getting better, let us tell people how things are.

8.8 pm

Brian White (Milton Keynes, North-East): It is always a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Rochford and Southend, East (Sir Teddy Taylor), who had the misfortune to have me as a constituent.

I welcome this morning's ceremony, which provides employment for an industry in my constituency which produces the vellum on which the Queen's Speech is printed. I also welcome several of the proposed Bills, and as a refugee from the Utilities Bill, I welcome in particular the communications Bill and the water Bill. I strongly support licensing reform and measures to tackle antisocial behaviour. I especially welcome the announcement about regional referendums, which is long overdue. The test of whether there is support for such referendums will come in the referendums themselves. We in the south-east of England desperately need regional government to be accountable; we have regional government, but it is not accountable to the people of the south-east.

Like other hon. Members, I am concerned about the omissions from the Queen's Speech. I hope that the Government will do more work on the draft mental health Bill and introduce it at a later date. Despite the contentious issues, several key matters need to be dealt with and I think that the Bill requires further work. I regret that no Bill on corporate manslaughter was announced and I hope that the Government will think again about that, but one omission on which they should be congratulated is that of a civil service Bill. It would be wrong to waste time debating such a Bill now, so its absence from the Queen's Speech is welcome.

Although it is right that we concentrate on the legislative side today, we should ensure that we examine implementation when we discuss the Bills themselves. I was a member of the Joint Committee that scrutinised the draft communications Bill. That Bill is a good example of the way in which we should legislate: the Departments involved consulted industry and parliamentarians when preparing the Bill; then the Joint Committee introduced some innovative ways in which to tackle the legislation. So far, the process has led to the production of a pretty good Bill that can be made better as it proceeds through the House. I hope to speak on Second Reading, but I want to emphasise today that it should not pretend to be a broadcasting Bill—it is a telecommunications Bill. There are other issues such as radio, the role of the regulator and getting the objectives right, which are just as important as the more obvious controversies surrounding broadcasting and the role of the BBC.

My concern about the Queen's Speech and the way in which Government legislation is presented is not that we are doing the wrong things—I do not think that we are—but that the things that appeal to our core supporters we do grudgingly, and the things that are necessary but appeal more to our opponents we do with apparent glee. Obstacles are put in the way when we tackle issues such as fox hunting and House of Lords reform, whereas the process of dealing with more controversial matters, such as the withdrawal of jury trial, appears to be accelerated. That alienates the people whose support we need to get reforms through and on whom we rely to implement them. That is a danger that we must avoid when we examine some of the Bills announced today.

The measures in the Queen's Speech require a change of culture as well as legislation. That is especially true of the measures on antisocial behaviour. In my constituency, as in many constituencies throughout the country, we had a problem with travellers, with the rate of illegal encampments running at about 150 a week. The council, landowners and police created a body called the travellers management unit, which was headed by a police sergeant. Instead of several agencies working individually, the unit could use the appropriate powers by itself. The result of that change in culture is that last week there was one illegal travellers' encampment, and for most of this year the average number has been zero or one, and the cleansing bill has decreased from more than £300,000 a year to £325 this year.

That tremendous success required a change of culture, as well as use of the provisions of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. No legislation that we push through Parliament will have an impact unless it is accompanied by such a culture change. Incidentally, when we were discussing the code of conduct for that travellers management unit, the leader of the Conservative group insisted that he would not endorse the unit. He preferred the sort of rhetoric attacking travellers that has not worked anywhere in this country. The response of the hon. Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry) when I asked him about restorative justice emphasises that point.

One of the problems we have encountered in the past is being unable effectively to translate pilots to the mainstream. That is especially true of action to deal with antisocial behaviour. Others have gone through the list of measures that are necessary, but I shall focus on a couple. There is a desperate need to ban immediately the use of fireworks outside organised displays. Constituents have told me about fireworks going off at 1.30 in the morning, about the problems caused to their children and their pets, and about the disruption to their lives. A ban is needed, and I hope that the Government will do that willingly, and not have to be dragged into doing so grudgingly.

Drunkenness has been mentioned by other hon. Members. Although I welcome the proposals on licensing reform, we must learn the lessons of the regulatory reform orders for new year's eve, when too little time was allowed for implementation. We should not rush to legislate—it is more important to get certain things right than to get them quickly. In particular, we must take account of the impact on the work force and on public services such as transport. It is right to remove licensing restrictions, but we must be aware of the consequences.

I had intended to talk about the need for drug rehabilitation measures, but my right hon. Friend the Member for Rother Valley (Mr. Barron) covered most of that ground and I agree with his comments. We must recognise that there are alternatives to prison—there is no one size fits all solution to antisocial behaviour. Prison works for some people and some crimes, but not for all. I fear that by trying to do things in silos, we cause problems.

I have long been a campaigner for some of the provisions of the planning Bill. One of the problems is that we have not recognised how different pieces of legislation interact, and the planning Bill will contribute to the reduction in crime. Many of the problems we have

[Brian White]

encountered have arisen because we have thought of planning as a process rather than a political outcome. We can design a lot of crime out of the environment. I think that structural plans are the wrong layer to remove, but that is a matter of detail. What is important is that the planning reforms can have a major impact on the quality of people's lives.

I worry that, once again, the Home Office is to have three or four Bills in this Session. In each Session, the Home Office work load is great, and there is a danger that it will concentrate too much on new legislation and not enough on getting some of the issues within the Department under control. When debating the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002, we heard about the problems of the immigration and nationality directorate; we have also heard about the criminal justice system being antiquated.

The Home Office promoted a number of regulations arising from the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 and the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001, but when they came to be examined by Parliament, there was an outcry because the Department had not consulted industry properly, and the industry said that there were better ways in which to achieve the Government's desired outcome. We must work on proposals with voluntary groups and industry. In one example, it was thought that a statutory instrument was required, but the industry pointed out that the Department for Work and Pensions already had equivalent powers; all that was required was an application to the Data Protection Registrar to use the information for national security purposes. That, not another piece of legislation, was the solution. We have to be prepared to recognise that there may be much better ways of achieving our aims.

October witnessed the highest number of digital attacks on private and public companies in this country, including quite a few attacks by terrorist groups. The Queen's Speech rightly emphasises the importance of tackling terrorism, but I urge the Government to do that in ways that work with the grain of industry, not against it—ways that use people's skills. In Canada, some people working in financial services have been made Royal Canadian Mounted Police deputies in order to tackle some forms of terrorist crime. Such innovative methods are available to us—methods that do not damage business and are not confined solely to individual Government agencies, but which instead involve the whole community.

The Queen's Speech, rightly, talks about moving from a criminal justice system to a victims' justice system—although I personally would settle for a justice system. Anyone who sees the criminal justice system from the outside recognises that although we have a British legal system, we have precious little justice in this country. Merger within the courts system might be the right solution—I think that it is—but if we fail to bring people on board and if the changes do not translate into improvements on the ground, all we will achieve is a lot of argument and the alienation of key workers for no gain. There is a real danger of that happening if we are not careful.

Anybody who knows how organisations work understands that there is both a formal mechanism and a parallel informal mechanism. Too often in the House, we concentrate on the formal side, which accounts for only a small part of the way in which organisations work. We rarely concentrate on informal mechanisms, which is one reason why the hon. Members for Banbury and for Rochford and Southend, East could comment as they did on public services. We need to get informal structures right—in a legal setting, changes to the law are even more important. If people do not perceive that change has been made, the fact that we have made such a change will not do us any good.

Public service reform is a key aim of this Parliament, which is continued in the Queen's Speech. As I said, that requires a change of culture, not just the legislation that is going through. The House may concentrate on the legislative process, but we cannot take our eye off the other routes needed to achieve that aim.

We have made significant changes, and hopefully self-indulgent long speeches will be a thing of the past in the House—I shall shut up in a second. We have introduced reforms such as having an annual calendar, carry-over Bills and far more pre-legislative scrutiny, but there is still a lot more we can do to introduce more focused Bills and regulatory reform orders instead of unnecessarily wide-ranging Bills. We are not very good at auditing and reviewing what we are doing in the House—again, that needs to be built into the process. When we debate the Queen's Speech, we should not just go over what is new, but look back and review what has been effective.

The Queen's Speech rightly emphasises rights and responsibilities, concentrating on issues which provoke a lot of people to come to Members' surgeries. The proposed Bills are welcome, but we will be judged on what happens on our estates and in our villages, not on the hair-splitting that will take place in many Committee Rooms. What matters is what works on the estates. I am convinced that the legislative changes will help, but we must make sure that the implementation and administration of change will receive focused attention from Ministers and Committees.

8.22 pm

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): It is a privilege to follow the hon. Member for Milton Keynes, North-East (Brian White). He is not only a former constituent of mine but followed me in the college at which we were both privileged to be educated. In that context, the hon. Member for Rochford and Southend, East (Sir Teddy Taylor), who asked for an examination before anything was done about changing to a comprehensive system, looked at the example of Glasgow. I came from a working-class area of Belfast and, as a result of the scholarship system, managed to get into a Methodist college. Consequently, like many of us in the area, I managed to move on. We have got to provide an education system that allows people to develop their skills, which are not necessarily academic.

I therefore differ to some extent from the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, North-East (Mr. Purchase), who said that specialist schools will take us back to the old grammar schools because they do not provide choice. The harsh reality, as the illustration used by the hon. Member for Rochford and Southend,

East of two comprehensive schools in Southend showed, is that parents do not have choice. They are misled when they are told that they have parental choice, as we have discovered in my constituency, where parents trying to get their children into a local primary school discovered that they may have to send them to a more distant one. South Belfast has been denuded of state secondary education, so people from working-class and poor families have to travel more than three miles. There is no transport entitlement, as the distance has been measured and is just under the three-mile limit. People therefore do not qualify for transport allowance. No one, however, could walk through those areas, whether nationalist or so-called loyalist, especially if they were wearing a uniform. Someone coming from another area would get into trouble—even a loyalist in a loyalist area.

We should therefore abandon the concept that everything can be done in a particular way. I share the belief that one style is not necessarily appropriate to every problem. When the hon. Member for Wolverhampton, North-East talked about common sense, I could not help but think of an old professor who used to say to us, "Gentleman, common sense—the most uncommon of all the senses." Sometimes a collective Parliament can get it wrong—we think that we have common sense because we are commoners elected by the people.

We must examine in greater detail what is happening. I regret that we have not been allocated a day on which to deal with foreign affairs, in which we take an interest. I fear that successive Governments—I am not making a party political point about the present Government—have been far too enamoured of the alluring European Union and have been prepared to sacrifice the first principle of government, which is to provide for and protect their own citizens. Because we like to have the support of the Republic of Ireland in Europe, we are prepared to sacrifice Northern Ireland. Similarly, the Spanish could help us greatly to get away with things in Europe, so Gibraltar could be sacrificed. As the protector of the citizens of the United Kingdom, the House should be prepared to deal with the international issues where we are too often the fall-guy.

It is understandable that the passage in the Queen's Speech on the Belfast agreement is of concern to us in Northern Ireland, and I shall come to that in a moment. First, however, I want to comment on other more general issues. On health, I regret that we have not proceeded with the health Bill. I accept that it may have had weaknesses, but there are even greater weaknesses in the present provision of health services. The sooner they are tackled, the better. We must try to assess what is happening. We may pride ourselves on waiting lists going down, but the harsh reality is that management, to meet the demands to reduce lists, often steps in and tells consultants that they must deal with less-important operations. As a result, consultants are becoming disillusioned—there is a loss of morale in the health service—as they believe that their priority is their duty to patients, and patients with the greatest need should be dealt with first. As a result, people who require serious operations have been put on a longer waiting list, while those needing less-urgent operations have been treated to bring down the number on the waiting list. We must watch that carefully.

I have discovered something fascinating, which other hon. Members may have noticed too. Constituents come to me with their problems and tell me that they have been to their doctor or consultant, who has told them to speak to their Member of Parliament. Why? That is playing the political game and blaming politicians for not providing the facilities. We all know that we have been pouring more money into the health service, but it has not always been used wisely or well. We must re-examine that policy.

Constituents also come to me with problems such as noisy neighbours, vandalism and destruction. They tell me that they have been to the police, but the desk sergeant has told them to speak to their Member of Parliament. Again, the police are playing the political game, blaming politicians for the fact that they do not have enough money or manpower. It is the structures of our society that need to be addressed.

In that context, I welcome the Government's proposal to deal with antisocial behaviour. I understand that that may be extended to Northern Ireland, as this Chamber is responsible for law and order in Northern Ireland. I hope that the legislation will apply to Northern Ireland, rather than being set side until the devolved Administration is re-established and can deal with the matter. The matter is urgent. Only yesterday, I received a plea from a cross-communal body campaigning for a change in legislation dealing with so-called joyriding and car theft. Most of those people came from what would be known as nationalist areas, where children have been killed by joyriders who have walked free, or in some cases received a six-month sentence, and who have no sense of accountability. The group is urging that action be taken.

The Queen's Speech refers to

"the full implementation of the Belfast Agreement"

and the introduction of legislation on policing matters. I do not know what those matters are—that has not been trailed, but we have been told regularly that it was agreed at Weston Park. My understanding is that it was not agreed within the so-called conference at Weston Park. Colleagues who were there say that it was not discussed in their presence, and nothing was agreed in their presence. However, it is obvious that the two Governments, with a section of Northern Ireland society, decided to go forward in a particular way. That is not in the Belfast agreement.

Before we go any further down that road, we might be wise to take an in-depth look at the Belfast agreement. I have no difficulty with an Assembly in Northern Ireland. I may not like it if members of a party that opposes mine are in government, but they are there because of the will of the people. However, under the system of government that has developed, the Executive are not accountable to the people of Northern Ireland. The Executive are not cohesive. Forming an Executive under the d'Hondt principle will allow the electorate only to change the number of seats that a party might have, but in the foreseeable future the four main parties will still be required to provide the Executive, and they are not acting collectively.

What do I mean by that? A young girl was savagely raped at the weekend in west Belfast. Another 17-year-old girl from the area was interviewed. Women in the area were terrified and horrified, and did not know how

[Rev. Martin Smyth]

they could go out, in such circumstances. The Assembly Member for the area, who is Minister of Health and a woman, was interviewed on the same programme. Asked how she felt about the situation, she said that she did not like it. Asked whether she had advised her constituents to report incidents and give information to the Police Service of Northern Ireland, she said that she had told her constituents to advise those people whom they could trust in the constituency and who have been looking after things in the constituency. She was unwilling, as a Member of the Executive, to advise her constituents to speak to the police service serving the community. That is one of the problems of cohesion. It is near time that the Government in this place introduced legislation to deal with antisocial behaviour, rather than adding changes to the police, who are already under tremendous pressure.

I know that other hon. Members want to speak, and I share the view of those who try to curtail speeches in this place, although if I was tempted I could go on for 45 minutes without any bother. I want to deal with a topic that must be dealt with by the House in the foreseeable future—university research in Northern Ireland. In a Westminster Hall debate on the research assessment exercise, I praised and supported university researchers but pointed out the disparity between the allocations for universities in Northern Ireland and those elsewhere. The percentage per capita in Scotland is three times that in Northern Ireland, in England twice the amount and in Wales even more. In the recent round, the Government rightly increased the amount going to university research establishments, but in the recent draft Budget in Northern Ireland not a pound extra was given to the universities. I believe, as I think others in the House believe, that the future of our nation, and certainly of our Province, will depend on knowledge-based industries. It is deplorable that the two universities that have served the community well should be so treated. Queen's university, which took itself into the first division of British universities, achieving, at the last assessment, 19th place, has been told that it has done well and should try to do better, but that it will receive no help. The university of Ulster has also improved its position in the university league table, but it too has not been rewarded.

As a result, university entrants will look around, and many English and Scottish universities that have gladly taken young people from Northern Ireland will be happy to take more, and people such as the hon. Member for Milton Keynes, North-East will be serving here, to which I have no objection, but will be lost to Northern Ireland. That is one of the prices that we have to pay if the Department in Northern Ireland and the Treasury supporting it do not allow that extra money to restore the differential between university research in Northern Ireland and elsewhere. Biomedical, biotechnology and engineering research in Northern Ireland is world-renowned. I believe that I speak not only for Northern Ireland but for the United Kingdom when I say that that would be money well spent.

I shall not detain the House further, but simply remind hon. Members not to take too seriously the concept of the Belfast agreement because it did not come down from Mount Sinai.

8.37 pm

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): It is becoming something of a tradition in the House for me to follow the hon. Member for Belfast, South (Rev. Martin Smyth). It has happened time and again. The points that he made about legislation on policing illustrate the theme that I want to develop. The Queen's Speech contains 10 little words:

"Legislation will be brought forward on policing in Northern Ireland."

The hon. Gentleman and I are members of the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee, which is interested in such matters. We might be able to make some reasonable guesses as to what is being proposed, but we do not know anything beyond those few words, and that is a problem that we have generally in debating the Queen's Speech. We never quite know what will result from the proposals in it. We may have a good idea because some measures have been trailed or leaked, but the speech itself is a thinly worded document and some of the details will not start to emerge until tomorrow. Even then, when we debate specific subjects, we will not have the legislation before us.

I for one am not clear about which items in the Queen's Speech I will be supporting, which I shall give critical support to, and which go too far and I would like the Government to pull back on—items that I need to start warning the Whips about, in respect of which I may receive a letter because I cannot go along with them.

I want to illustrate my remarks with an example from last year's Queen Speech:

"My Government will introduce legislation to encourage enterprise, strengthen competition laws, and promote safeguards for consumers."—[*Official Report*, 20 June 2001; Vol. 370, c. 32.]

Perhaps I should be more careful about words. I should have realised that the word "enterprise" might present some problems for a democratic socialist. However, it was not until much later, when the legislation was before the House, that I began to be worried about aspects of the Enterprise Bill. In particular, I was concerned about the fact that the Government were virtually getting rid of references made on grounds of public interest, including job losses, exports and so on, in relation to a takeover. Indeed, there are no longer serious possibilities of references to the Competition Commission by the Office of Fair Trading or the Department of Trade and Industry. That led me to fight for a place on the Committee considering the Bill and to raise the issue on a number of occasions, causing a couple of rebellions on the Labour Benches against the Government's position. Obviously, I eventually lost out, as my strength is not as great as that of the Whips.

What does the Queen's Speech contain that might bother me as much in future? Perhaps I should consider the wording a little more carefully. There is a great deal on which I will support the Government in the Lobby and in what I say. As I am here a great deal, apart from the occasions on which I go to Northern Ireland, I can claim to vote as much for the Government as anybody, even if there is sometimes rebellion. There is much in the Queen's Speech that I find very acceptable. What it says about the Belfast agreement—and what I understand needs to be made clear for it to survive—is that the ball is very much in Sinn Fein's court. Sinn Fein needs to respond and to detach itself from paramilitary

involvement, or it will not be possible readily to establish the future of the Northern Ireland Executive. At last, we also have a measure in connection with hunting with dogs, which is very welcome.

I shall therefore concentrate on the aspects that might cause me problems, rather than those on which I will solidly support the Government. I can do so as I am not seeking office anywhere. If I spell out some of my difficulties, someone might listen and take them into account.

The Queen's Speech contained these three little words: "constructive foreign policy", but the fact that the Government are in favour of such a policy does not tell us anything. Woodrow Wilson and Mussolini could have claimed at the same time to favour constructive foreign policies that were entirely different and conflicting. The aspect of foreign policy that worries me tremendously is the situation regarding Iraq and the likely direction in which we seem to be moving. The possibility that the position outlined by my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Andrew Mackinlay) does not make progress, and that action is taken, worries me a great deal.

I spent two years' national service in Iraq, way back in 1954 to 1956, and came to know the Iraqi people well. I have taken a great interest in what has since occurred in the country, which has been through many difficult periods. The problems under Saddam Hussein have been massive and people have suffered tremendously. Should those same people suffer now from bombardment and invasion, and what will we get at the end of it? We might finish up with a substitute Saddam Hussein who is more acceptable to western powers, but treats his population in a similar way. That concerns me. I want us to be constructive, although perhaps in a different way from that in which the Government see it.

The Queen's Speech went on to talk about two issues together that represent something like the new Labour philosophy. It links sound public finance and secure high employment, and goes on to link them with investment in public services. The problem is that we want to be prudent and careful and allow the market to operate, and also deliver many public provisions. As long as the system works well under such arrangements, resources exist to make the provisions. As a democratic socialist, I believe that one has to intervene more in economies' operation, without overloading them, to ensure justice in taxation and other provisions that create, for example, high employment and the required investment in public services.

A major item in the Queen's Speech involves the criminal justice system. We will have many discussions in the House about that. I am worried about the plans to allow retrials of cases after acquittal. We must be very careful. However, the speech included welcome measures, such as tackling antisocial behaviour. My hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes, North-East (Brian White) mentioned the specific problem of fireworks.

Fireworks cause disastrous problems in my constituency and in those of many other hon. Members. I hope that antisocial behaviour orders and fixed penalties can begin to be directed towards people who disturb young children, elderly people, those who are infirm, those who suffer from mental problems and domestic pets. They are treated in an unacceptable way. We need legislation, but there may be scope for amendments when we tackle antisocial behaviour in the criminal justice measure.

The Gracious Speech also covered health, and devolving power and resources to front-line staff. We need to be aware of the big gap in democratic involvement and participation in running the health service. For example, we have had problems with policies on community health councils and the role of the trade unions. The consideration that unions should receive and the input that they should make into decisions should influence any measures in that category.

My hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, North-East (Mr. Purchase) has already mentioned some of the problems of raising educational standards. "Choice" is often used to cover selection and elitism. My hon. Friend talked about Plato without mentioning him by name. Plato distinguished between gold, silver and lead, and between individuals who are in different categories and operate in different ways. That should be anathema to those who believe in liberal education principles, releasing people's potential and acquiring the skills that are needed to run a democratic society as effectively as possible.

Let us consider the social security system and the work on that. The Government suffer from the problem that, although they have done much good work, for example, establishing arrangements such as Jobcentre Plus, the philosophy is one of "off benefits and into work"; of squeezing people off benefit to encourage them to get work. Many of us believe that the principle should operate the other way round, and that we should ensure that people have job opportunities and encourage them to take them up, thus leading to less need for benefits.

The next item is probably the major subject that we shall tackle: the modernisation of local government, including better financial management. I served on the Standing Committee in 1987—it was my first Standing Committee— that considered the measure that became the Local Government Finance Act 1988, which led to the poll tax. The poll tax has been changed to the council tax—essentially that is the only change—with some tweaking of the standard spending assessment and the arrangements that come from that. However, massive legislative changes are needed. There have already been some discussions on the Floor of the House. Many of us have responded to an important consultative document. If we do not overcome some of the injustices of the system that was set up as a result of the 1988 legislation, we shall be in for a disastrous period. Many hopes are riding on us at last getting fair systems established. I have already spoken about these matters, and there is an Adjournment debate tomorrow in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Amber Valley (Judy Mallaber), when Derbyshire's problems will be debated and discussed.

Derbyshire has police funding problems. If it does not get 5 per cent. more of the resources that have been earmarked for it, it will not be able to sustain the level of services that it has been providing.

Different options have been set out. Extra money will be coming in in future years, and in the grid of different shire counties, there are five different options. We find

[Mr. Harry Barnes]

that 87.7 per cent. of the relevant cases finish up worse off under the new funding arrangements. Funding within shire counties needs carefully to be taken into account. If the police, environmental health officials and trading standards officers who come under these funding arrangements are to do their job properly in terms of fireworks, for example, they will need the necessary resources.

I am worried about what has been said about the planning system. There is a move to push through planning decisions much more quickly without proper and adequate democratic debate and discussion. It seems that we should be moving much more in that direction rather than away from it.

I move on to the material at the back of the Queen's Speech about playing

"a leading role in combating terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction".

and about improvements in terms of the third world. Tackling the problems of terrorism has been seen as two-sided. First, there is tackling weaponry within terrorism itself and its operation with al-Qaeda and other organisations. Secondly, we must tackle some of the causes that people can take hold of and develop. We must ensure that the third world does not have the destitution problems that now exist. That must be tackled seriously.

The Government have done much good work in the area of international development. They have taken a lead, for example, in dealing with third-world debt. I would like to see them take a lead also in terms of the resources that are available for tackling third-world poverty. Let us have an international tax and agreement about currency speculation. Tobin introduced the idea and War on Want now calls it the Robin Hood tax. It would be a popular tax among most people apart from the few who would have to pay it. It would dampen down some of the speculation that hammers economies throughout the world. It would assist greatly in ensuring that finance and resources that are desperately needed in the third world begin to be available to it. That will not necessarily be established readily and easily, but if we took a lead, I am sure that it would have a similar impact to the tackling of third world debt, even if more needs to be done on that issue. I may have several amendments to table or objections to make when the details are known, but the proof of the pudding will be in the eating.

8.55 pm

Richard Younger-Ross (Teignbridge): I hope to be brief, but I wish to address four items from the Queen's Speech. It says that university reform proposals will be published to improve access and build on excellence. No one can disagree with that, but I hope that we will build on excellence in the broader sense than just a narrow academic sense. In education, we tend to consider a narrow definition of academic success. For example, in primary education, some parents try to prime their children for early-stage exams. Children are hot-housed, but that can often lead to them burning out. If we define excellence in universities too narrowly, we are in danger of losing much of what is good in various universities.

I have an example in my constituency. The university of Plymouth is an excellent university, but it currently proposes to close its colleges in outlying areas. That would affect a college in my constituency at Seale-Hayne, which was established in the 1920s as an agricultural college. It has always been a centre of excellence and in recent years it became part of the new University of Plymouth, since when it has developed several other courses such as land management, rural affairs, food and other subjects. The proposal is that the college be closed and all the students moved to the main campus in Plymouth. The argument is that a greater critical mass is needed to achieve greater academic ends, and it is difficult to argue with that.

I have talked to the students at the college, and they say that size is not everything. They learn other things by being at the college, which is a particularly pleasant place to study. Where better to study rural affairs or tourism at an academic level than in the heart of the countryside in a tourist area? The students can learn as much from being there as they can from their academic studies. The location of the college broadens their understanding more than a purely academic focus.

If the colleges are all moved to one campus, that will also undermine the part that the university plays in the regional network. In Oxford, they used to have riots between the students and the local people, because they had little contact. If we lock our universities away on to one campus, they lose the ability to relate to the wider community.

The second aspect of the Queen's Speech that I wish to address is the reference to speeding up the planning system. Several hon. Members have already mentioned that point and expressed fears, which I understand, that if the process is speeded up, consultation will be cut out. My background is in architecture—I spent many years in various architectural practices—and I can assure hon. Members that the planning process for most people can be speeded up. For instance, local authorities have devolved powers to parish and town councils. That was brilliantly done in the district of South Somerset, whose town council was Yeovil. When dealing with a planning application for a client, we received the first response within four weeks, which enabled me to go back to my client to describe the problems about which the town council was worried. Within another four weeks, we submitted an amended application, and we received a final decision in favour of my client.

Under the straightforward committee system, people are lucky to get a decision from most district councils within eight weeks, which is supposed to be the statutory period within which a decision must be made. Up and down the country, the architect, surveyor or whoever makes the application will receive a letter after eight weeks—other Members will know this and have complaints about it—saying, "Do you mind? We wish to extend our period of consideration of your plans." Of course, everyone says yes to that. In some areas, particularly in inner London, I recall such consultations going on for 16, 20 or 30 weeks, without going further forward. A lot of that nonsense involves getting strung up on committee systems, which could be streamlined if we considered who could make decisions and the level at which they are taken.

I give a constituency example—the Kingskerswell bypass. A lot of my constituents say that they do not want the bypass; a lot say that they do. The process is strung out over a long period and it involves the initial plans drawn up by the county council, the consultation period and the resubmitted plans. Following resubmission, plans go out to the planning process and, eventually, the Secretary of State would hold a public inquiry. Ultimately, the decision would rest with the Secretary of State. If anyone is telling me that there is not some duplication in that process that could be cut out to achieve a speedier decision, I would like them to explain.

We could compact the beginning of the process—the local authority planning stage and the public consultation, which take place before the start of the public inquiry—and bring forward the dates involved by at least two years, if not three. We are talking about seven or eight years, so there would be a significant benefit to the people of Kingskerswell. They do not know whether they will get their bypass or not. On the one hand, those who want it would see the benefit once it was built; on the other, those who do not want it would know that there is to be no bypass, so they could develop their land or do what they liked on the land that adjoins and abuts the possible site.

Thirdly, the Queen's Speech says:

"A Bill will also be introduced to help ensure that local authorities support older people awaiting discharge from hospital."

I find that wording quite extraordinary. From what we have heard from those on the Government Benches, they do not mean support. They mean that they will penalise local authorities if they have difficulty in placing the elderly people from the hospital in a care home or a nursing home.

We in the House keep using the term "bed blocking". May I ask hon. Members not to use it, as it sounds as if the poor person in the bed is to blame? They are not at fault; the system is. We could use the term "bed locking", as I am sure that patients would much rather be out of the hospital than in it. It sounds almost as if they are chained there, but they are not unwilling to move.

It is not easy for a local authority to place people if there are no care homes to move them to or if those homes are struggling financially and, as in many cases, under threat of closure. It is not easy to place people if the Government, through fines, are taking away the money for the provision of the service and transferring it to the NHS. It would be far better if the Government recognised the economic realities of social services departments, and the need for them to invest more so that the elderly care sector has the funds that it requires.

The Government will say that they provide enough money for that sector. What they do not do is provide enough for child care. Local authorities throughout the country—Labour, Liberal Democrat, Conservative and under no overall control—have to divert money from the elderly to make legal provision for child care and child protection. We must end that. It will require another £400 million or £500 million. A year ago, our director of social services said that about £1 billion was needed. Although the Government have been generous, providing £400 million and then £300 million, that still does not amount to £1 billion—and, of course, time has moved on.

Moreover, the Joseph Rowntree Foundation says that bringing care homes up to standard would require £1 billion on top of the £1 billion mentioned by the director of social services. If that money is forthcoming, most of it will almost certainly have to come from the Exchequer. I ask the Government not to hit the donkey if the donkey is struggling to carry the load, because that will only break its back.

There is a proposal to abolish fixed pub opening hours, and to introduce a range of measures to reduce the amount of antisocial behaviour. I approve of the wording, but the legislation is much overdue. I hope that it has not been included just because the Government have been getting a lot of stick for not introducing it, having promised all the young people they texted before the last election that they would do so. I hope that it will have been enacted a year from now.

I also hope, however, that the licensing laws will remain with the magistrates. The industry fears that if they go to local authorities, they will become more arbitrary and will be subject to numerous pressures other than the basic question, which is "Are these people fit to run a licensed premise, and do they run it in a good way?" I think that the police and magistrates are better able to judge that than are local authorities, with all their politics. I am not disagreeing with what was said by the hon. Member for Rochford and Southend, East (Sir Teddy Taylor) about the need for local authorities to have a say on the hours during which pubs can stay open. That is a separate debate, and I will not venture a view now. It is important, however, for licences to be granted fairly, and for that to be seen to be done. Furthermore, if there are problems with antisocial behaviour, it is the police who will know about them.

I hope that other aspects of the present licensing legislation will be included in the new Bill. One of the early-day motions with the most signatures concerns the campaign for a full pint, which I am sure is supported by all parties and all political complexions. I also hope that the Government will review their decision to abolish the beer orders, which I fear would open up all the problems we experienced with breweries in the past. It would get rid of the guest-ale provision for chains of more than 2,000 pubs, and introduce covenants to prohibit the use of premises as pubs in rural villages.

I hope that the Government will see the broader picture, and consider some of my suggestions.

9.10 pm

Mr. Clive Soley (Ealing, Acton and Shepherd's Bush): When I look at a Queen's Speech, I look not just at what is in it but at the general thrust and strategy of the Government's policy. The first period of the Conservative Government elected in 1979 changed the mood of the country and the second period began to change the structure of the country. That is what we are doing now and I am pleased to see it.

One paragraph in the Queen's Speech has attracted little attention: that on the second page that deals with the welfare state. It says that the Government

"wants to create a welfare state based on giving people rights and responsibilities. They will pursue proposals that focus on the importance of work as part of our social security system."

It is important that that part of the speech gains more attention because it redefines the welfare state.

[Mr. Clive Soley]

The Labour party created the original welfare state in 1945 alongside the concept of trying to achieve full employment. The problem for us in the intervening years was matching full employment with the welfare state and not creating a welfare state that just paid benefits to people who could not work. The problem for the Tory party—it was shown today by the Leader of the Opposition and one or two other Conservative Members—is that it has not quite worked out what to do with public services and how important full employment is to that issue. Until it addresses that issue and gets its act together, particularly on public services, it will fail to deal with the needs of the public. It does not know whether it wants to privatise more and cut public services or try to match what the Government are doing. There is a fundamental contradiction in where it is at the moment.

The concept of rights and responsibilities runs through much of the Queen's Speech: for example, through the law and order issue. There is an expectation that behaviour should improve, that families have responsibility for bringing up children, that schools and other people have responsibilities over and above teaching and that other members of the community—all of us individually—have responsibilities as well as rights. It runs through other areas but the most important is employment.

I give two short examples from my constituency. One man who had not worked for nine years got a council property when he was married and had one child. He has had three more children since then and still has not worked. He rang me recently to say that he had a right to a bigger flat. Clearly, he needs a bigger flat, if only for the sake of the children, but to put that in context we need to say that he also has a duty to find work.

If we were in the 1980s, I would not have put it in that way because 3 million people were unemployed; in fact, it was rather more than 3 million, but that is what the figures showed. Even in an area such as mine, a prosperous area that survived the two slumps of the 1980s and 1990s quite well, people who did not have many skills found it difficult to get employment. That is no longer true because we have virtually full employment. There is no reason why the man in the example that I gave should not be able to work. I hope to achieve that end in the not too distant future.

A woman rang me this week who is in a similar position, although the background is different. In a way, it was easier to feel sympathy for her. The example highlights the problem that this country has had over a number of years because of high unemployment. It is particularly true of areas outside London—many northern regions have generations of unemployment. She is in her early 30s and had never worked, apart from for a short time in a couple of jobs. She also rang me to get a larger house because she has children; again, there is a need for a larger house. When I talked through with her the importance of getting back into work, the extra child care money available from the Government, the extra money that she could get from the working families tax credit if she were on low pay, she said that she did not want to work at this moment, that she could not work, and that she just needed somewhere bigger to live.

The old idea of creating dependency, on one level, is right; however, that does not explain the full depth of that woman's problem. Basically, she is a depressed lady and, in due course, might end up in a psychiatric hospital because depression will destroy her life. We must get people out of that trap and, to do so, we must combine employment opportunities and training with the benefits system. If we can reform the welfare state in that way, we will achieve something dramatically different and, to some extent, we will produce a system similar to those of other European countries, particularly the Scandinavian countries.

In London, we suffer from incredibly high property prices. I moved a few years ago from Shepherd's Bush to Acton, which was regarded then by estate agents as a downmarket move, although I am not sure that that is technically right. The reality is that four-bedroom houses in Acton in reasonably good condition are renting at £3,000 to £4,000 a month. That produces a problem, of which the Government are well aware, regarding housing benefit and how we keep people in the area.

The Tories are talking about the right to buy for housing association tenants, and I recognise that that is politically attractive. Saying to people in London that they can have 50 per cent. off a house that they can sell for several hundred thousand pounds offers a good prize. However, we must bear it in mind that, during the Conservatives' 18 years in office, 3 million houses went out of the rented sector; about a million from the private rented sector and most of the other 2 million from the council sector under the right to buy. That is one reason why we have a mega-problem in London and the south-east in terms of affordable rented accommodation.

The Government have not done enough to replace such housing but I understand the difficulties, particularly in the south; so much so that I am now looking at packages for people in my area. When I am approached about housing, I ask whether the people concerned are prepared to move right out of London. I have talked to several colleagues from the north and the midlands—where there are houses to spare; often quite good houses in quite good areas—and suggested that we move that person or family out. However, there are problems. Often local authorities, to their credit, will pay a removal cost and the better ones will even pay for a family to visit to see the area.

Frankly, we need a number of things, including a more sophisticated package, including more than one visit to the area and the ability to stay in an area for a day or two to find out about jobs, schools, hospitals and so on. There is also the umbilical cord syndrome, as I call it. A number of people have told me that they would move from London, but that their mother, father, uncle or friends are in the area and give them some degree of support. They also know that many who move out of London have a better quality of life, particularly those from the income group about which we are talking.

I would like to see a system in which we are able to say to people who move that they will have a two-year gap to test out their new location. If it does not work, they can come back to a property of similar size, which will be provided for them. My guess is that many people would go, not just younger people. There used to be an organisation called Seaside homes. When the Greater London Council was abolished, Seaside homes went

with it; it was privatised. Those homes at the seaside were offered to elderly people in London who wanted to retire to the seaside. In doing so, a house was freed up in London. Such packages, including more help to buy and the shared equity approach, should be explored to deal with the serious problem in the south of England.

I briefly mention education. In areas like mine, some schools are trapped in the situation where, inevitably, they draw from areas where there are multiple social problems, so the schools need additional help. The Government have not failed to give that additional help. Indeed, we gave one school in my area—which was regarded some years ago as a failing school and has been turned round extremely well in recent times—£3 million over and above the norm in order to achieve that. It was one of the six failing schools throughout the United Kingdom. I was there last night, when the school mounted a splendid presentation, which was very impressive, with well disciplined children—a real turnaround.

Whether in that school or in other schools in such areas, two things are needed most. The first is somewhere for the more disruptive children, not necessarily on the school site. Secondly, there is a desperate need for tutorial groups to be smaller, because some of them consist of 24 to 29 pupils. Although some people argue that the evidence does not necessarily prove that results are better for smaller groups, I do not believe that private schools—for which parents pay a fortune—that have groups of only eight, 10 or 12 do not believe that it is a good thing. I am sure that it is a good thing. If we could reduce the size of some of the tutorial groups, we would help those children who could achieve more in those groups.

I should have liked to speak a little about the media regulation Bill, but I am aware of the time. Let me bring together two issues that address the problem of regulation, particularly in the print media, which I know are not covered by the media Bill. It is a subject of general interest. There is a link to education because I refer to the resignation of my very good friend, the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Estelle Morris).

The way in which politics and journalism function in this country at present is doing both journalism and politicians no good whatever. As a result, we are both regarded badly in any polling. If it is any comfort to Members, politicians are regarded slightly more highly in all the polling over the past five to 10 years than are journalists—but only slightly, so we should not get too excited about that.

One of the reasons for that low regard is that so much of what we do both as journalists and as politicians is macho, aggressive and assertive. Looking back to the resignation of my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Yardley, if she had a fault—in my view she did not; she was a very able person by all standards—it was that she wore on her sleeve her openness, her inclusiveness and, above all, her willingness to accept criticism and to accept that she might not have the best policy. All the coverage of that suggested that it was weakness, and the word "weakness" was frequently used. In my view, it was a strength, actually, and we should say that very firmly.

When my right hon. Friend was replaced by my right hon. Friend the Member for Norwich, South (Mr. Clarke) and he was replaced by my right hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton, North and Bellshill (Dr. Reid), who was previously the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, the press and media described the new Ministers as bruisers. I know all three of those people extremely well and all three are good listeners and very good on understanding policy and problems of policy. Although my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Yardley wore her openness on her sleeve and that was one of the things that got her into difficulties, all three bring to politics something that is profoundly important; but my right hon. Friend brought something that was rather different from the norm. That is why it is so important that we get more women not only in this place, but in the media. If we had more women in senior places in the media, the media might not have the problem of being seen as displaying the same aggressive, macho style. Even when women do reach a senior position in the media, it is significant that some seem to get trapped into being equally aggressive, assertive and macho. To name but one, for whom I have a lot of respect—she probably will not forgive me for this—Kirsty Wark, the television news presenter, is often more macho and aggressive than many of the men, and she has got to the top by being like that. That is how it has happened, and people like my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Yardley, who brought that refreshingly open and different approach, pay the price for it. That is very sad, and I say that in the context of the media generally, which is an area that we need to consider.

I want to speak briefly on Iraq—I hope to do so at greater length in the not-too-distant future—because I have a very large number of Arabs in my constituency. Two of them are active members of my party. One, a Palestinian who was brought up in the camps, is the treasurer of my party, and would have taken the view that Palestine should extend from the river to the sea—thereby precluding the existence of Israel—but, over the years, has moved dramatically and sensibly towards the position that we must negotiate security for the Israeli community and the Palestinian community, and that there must be two states. When I talk to the many Arabs in my patch, I find that a majority—not as big a majority as people sometimes think—are opposed to us taking military action in Iraq. The overwhelming feeling among the Arabs in my constituency about Saddam Hussein, however, is a mixture of contempt, hatred and fear.

Let us make no mistake: Saddam Hussein is a psychopathic killer, and he would be in prison in any country where the rule of law applied. Speaking as someone in west London, every time such a person takes over a country—Milosevic is another example—we receive waves of refugees, and I cannot describe to hon. Members how horrific their experiences are. I know that many other Members have refugees in their constituencies, but, being in west London, I have a lot of them. I can understand—although, clearly, I do not condone it—how brutality can happen in the heat of a battle or a fight. There is something fundamentally different, however, when, in cold blood, a human being is held and repeatedly raped and tortured, or sees members of their family or friends being tortured or killed in front of them.

[Mr. Clive Soley]

I do not want to go into the matter much deeper, but I understand the practical reasons why we do not want to get in a position in which we merely change the leaders of states whom we do not like. The United Nations, which has been pretty successful at preventing nation states from attacking each other, has not, for understandable historical reasons—not least that it was not set up for the purpose—been very good at dealing with those states that are taken over by psychopathic killers who proceed to murder their populations. My hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Bow (Ms King) made a brilliant speech on that today, and she was right to focus on the genocide issue. We stood back and did nothing during the conflict in Rwanda, and we should have done something. I sat on the Opposition Benches when the Conservatives were in office, and I remember pointing out that Milosevic would not stop killing until we stopped him. I remember people saying that we must put in UN troops, which we did, but they had their arms taken off them and were tied to poles in exposed positions to say to the UN, "Don't push your luck." It was only when NATO intervened, without the formal structure of the UN, that we were able to stop the killing.

I want the UN to consider this question again—as a matter of reform—because, in terms of the moral question of whether Saddam Hussein should be removed, the answer is undoubtedly yes. Such action is morally justified, whatever the Church, bishops or anyone else says, and they are ducking their moral responsibility to think otherwise. There are practical considerations to take into account, such as whether we might make a disastrous situation worse, what we replace the regime with and whether the west's double standards towards Israel may inflame the region, but those are not moral reasons for walking by on the other side.

Let me compare the situation with domestic violence. Some 30, 40 or 50 years ago, a man could beat his wife to a pulp as long as he did it in his house. The people on the street would say, "Isn't it terrible? I'd hate to live there. Why doesn't she leave him? It must be awful for the children", but we are taking a similar approach to the Saddam Husseins of this world. We have to stop that and start saying that such behaviour is unacceptable.

I have several thousand Arab constituents and am fascinated by the fact that although most of them oppose military intervention, nearly all of them would agree with what I have said. We need to recognise that and address it, and I hope that we will return to the subject. Although the social issues and foreign policy issues, on which I touched, are profoundly important, I want to flag up a new aspect of foreign policy—the need to reform the United Nations so that we find ways to deal with such states.

9.31 pm

Mr. David Amess (Southend, West): Last year's Gracious Speech followed a massive Labour victory in the general election. Hon. Members can well understand Labour's enthusiasm to set out its clear legislative programme, but the Government have been found wanting in all respects. They were strong on rhetoric but short on delivery. I have no doubt the same will be true of this Gracious Speech.

I want to say a word about today's ceremony. The state opening of Parliament is precious and dear to the country. I am very proud of our Head of State. The golden jubilee celebrations were splendid. I regret the fact that the royal family has recently entered choppy waters. I hope that our precious gift of the sovereign and the state opening of Parliament is not going to be spoiled. We read in the newspapers that certain elements want to change all that, but it would be an absolute tragedy if anything were altered.

I have looked carefully at the Gracious Speech and have to ask: what is the point of any legislation? Given that laws are not enforced, we are in great danger of becoming a laughing stock. What is the point of meeting here as legislators, working hard on Bills that become Acts of Parliament, only to discover when we ask questions that laws are not being enforced? I have been fortunate to sponsor two private Members' Bills. The first, the Protection Against Cruel Tethering Act 1988, was a long time ago. A few weeks ago, I asked how many times that law had been enforced. I am still waiting for an answer. But I still get letters from constituents complaining about horses, ponies and donkeys abandoned on wasteland. I cannot chide the Government for not enforcing the other Act with which I am associated, the Warm Homes and Energy Conservation Act 2000, because we are still hearing what they plan to do to deliver the programme of ending fuel poverty within 10 years. I am, however, worried about the general lack of enforcement of Acts that we put on the statute book.

The Government are concerned about their performance on public services, but is there anything in the Gracious Speech to help to retain and recruit people in our key services? As a result of the Bills on which we will deliberate, will more women and men be in our police forces; will more of them work in our hospitals; will more teach in our schools? Sadly, I think not.

The centrepiece of the Gracious Speech is the criminal justice Bill. Oh dear, here we go again—more rhetoric, more gimmicks. There is absolutely nothing new in the detail of the proposals to combat antisocial behaviour. I find it bizarre that at the same time as the Government are telling us that they will deal with antisocial behaviour, we will see a relaxation in our licensing laws. I am proud to say that I enjoy a drink, but I am concerned that unless the Government later reveal something that we have not already read about in the newspapers, the proposal will place huge pressures on our already stretched police forces.

In Southend there is a pilot scheme for on-the-spot fines. That is wonderful, and I hope it works, but I am not aware that the Government have provided Southend police with any extra people to enforce the fines. It would be a brave police officer who tackled some of these yobs, if that is the idea of the pilot scheme, without being in fear of his or her life. The policy is another example of gesture politics.

Still on the subject of the lack of enforcement of existing laws, I know that some hon. Members are not interested in pro-life matters; I am. If we do not regard life as precious, I do not know what the House of Commons is about. Sir John Bourn of the National Audit Office tells us that, under the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority, £600,000 of licensed

treatments took place but were not billed. Are the Government doing anything about that? They are doing absolutely nothing.

Of course, some laws are being enforced. Today, my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Bob Spink) received an answer saying that, in 2000, nine babies were aborted at up to 24 weeks' gestation because they had a cleft palate. What a disgrace for the mother of all Parliaments. Even more shockingly, a baby with a cleft palate was aborted after 24 weeks' gestation. I hear absolute drivel talked about the reform of our working hours, which I regard as an absolute disaster. How on earth are we properly to scrutinise legislation if we are to work short hours? No doubt some of the measures on which we voted a week ago are good, but overall the reforms further diminish the worth of this, the mother of all Parliaments, and I despair of them.

The health and social care Bill is also splendid, but I have been advised by my local authority in Southend that fining local authorities who are not responsive in dealing with delayed discharges will cause them serious problems. The Health Committee on which I serve spent a great deal of time discussing delayed discharges, and we learned from our visit to Canada and America that it helps if one person is commissioned to ensure that people do not take up a bed unnecessarily.

It is very unfortunate that the Government are targeting local authorities. The idea comes from Sweden, but that model is not a good one. There, the measure was introduced gradually over two years and an enormous amount of money was put into sheltered homes. If the Government want to know why so many people are lying in hospital beds unnecessarily, it is because of their short-sightedness about the standards that they imposed on private and local authority residential homes, many of which, regrettably, are now having to close.

The Government believe that education is at the heart of all their proposals, and I welcome several of the measures in that respect contained in the Gracious Speech, but if the Government really want to know why truancy is so prevalent, they need look no further than parenting skills. I see nothing in the Gracious Speech that will address those serious issues. I regret that there is also nothing to deal with the issue of AS-levels. I should have thought that after the embarrassment that we all felt a few weeks ago, the Government would have recognised that AS-levels are not the right way forward and that they would have quickly inserted into the Gracious Speech a measure to change that examination. Unfortunately, however, nothing has been presented.

In local government, we in Southend have a splendid Conservative-controlled council, but it is struggling in several respects. Councillors are doing their best, but they tell me constantly that this centralising Government are taking away more of their powers. We have a housing crisis because so many people are being sent to Southend, mainly from London boroughs. My constituency, Southend, West, is a tiny urban area and there is no land on which to build. We ask for Government assistance. The chairman of the housing committee, Councillor Gwen Horrigan, has worked extremely hard on the problem, but we desperately need support from the Government.

I am concerned about the proposals to change our planning laws. It occurs to me that although the Government use the rhetoric of involving local residents in planning matters, the details of their proposals suggest that in future local people are to have even less of a say than they have now.

I conclude by listing a few Bills that I would have liked included in the Gracious Speech. Every Member of Parliament says how shocking the issues surrounding mobile phones are—they are worried about the health scares, they do not want any more of those ugly masts to be erected, and they are concerned about the number of people who drive while using their mobile phone. My local authority tells me that it has no powers in that respect—so who has the power to do something about the overuse of mobile phones?

I have tried to persuade the House to accept a Bill to protect endangered species. Surely we can find time to do something to protect exotic animals? It is no good Members of Parliament saying how terrible rhino hunting and other such activities are when we in this country import—albeit illegally—a huge number of exotic animals which are slaughtered.

Any number of Members of Parliament have talked about fireworks, and I eagerly awaited an announcement of legislation on that issue. Only this afternoon, a constituent faxed me to say that fireworks were going off nearby at 3.30 in the afternoon, scaring her family and the animals. Again, there was nothing in the Queen's Speech about that.

The Government are supposed to be extremely keen on energy efficiency, but sadly, their record on climate change is slipping backwards—in fact, the latest figures show that carbon dioxide levels are now higher than when Labour came to power. I would have liked to see in the Gracious Speech binding targets for energy efficiency improvements; energy efficiency surveys on new house purchases; cuts in VAT on energy saving materials; and energy efficiency measures in offices. Sadly, none of that is in the Gracious Speech. All Members will have had a briefing from Age Co[illegible]rn saying that it would very much have liked a prop[illegible] in the Gracious Speech to deal with age discrimina[illegible]n.

Yet again, the G[illegible]ious Speech is strong on rhetoric, but will be short[illegible] delivery. However, if any of the proposals that we shall spend the next year discussing are to be worth while, it is about time that we looked at Acts that are unenforced because of the lack of woman and manpower.

9.45 pm

Mrs. Ann Cryer (Keighley): I am much obliged to the hon. Member for Southend, West (Mr. Amess) for being brief—I am sure that he could have spoken for another hour. I shall try hard not to be macho, assertive or aggressive, but I shall be brief of necessity.

I really enjoyed the contribution of my hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Bow (Ms King), which was lively, entertaining and everything that speeches in the House often are not: perhaps—dare I say it?—that was partly to do with the fact that she is a woman. My hon. Friend was elected on the same day as me and the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster, Central (Ms Winterton) and the Under-

[Mrs. Ann Cryer]

Secretary of State for International Development who has just left the Chamber. We were among the 101 women Labour MPs elected five and a half years ago. None of the other parties has come anywhere near to achieving such electoral success for women, and I take great pride in the Labour party's achievement.

As I am short of time, I shall concentrate on the three paragraphs in the Gracious Speech that deal with the health service. The sentence that refers to

"healthcare based on the founding principles of the National Health Service"

warms my heart. I cannot think of a better example than a tiny hospital in my constituency, Ilkley Coronation hospital. If anyone knows Ilkley, they will realise that it is hardly a Labour heartland—I do not get many votes there, but it is my priority to keep that small hospital open. It provides excellent services, including physiotherapy, a dietician, an X-ray department, family planning—much appreciated by young ladies from the centre of my Keighley constituency—and day care. It used to have a minor injuries unit, but, in anticipation of wider closure, it has been closed by Airedale NHS trust. We expect the whole hospital to be closed, but that decision will be for the primary care trust. Until then, there will be a consultation period, and I shall campaign to keep the hospital open, as it is a basic ingredient of what the NHS should be. I know that there are other important health issues, to which I shall turn shortly, but it is a gem of a hospital, and I shall come down next Tuesday with the chair of Ilkley parish council to see the Minister of State, Department of Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Redditch (Jacqui Smith) to try to persuade her to help me to keep the hospital open for the people of Ilkley.

The hospital was purchased with public subscriptions from the people of Ilkley and built about 100 years ago. I visited it a few months ago. It is not at all seedy—it is a good little hospital providing an excellent service. I am not going to be dogmatic. If someone says that they can provide all those services at the Springs medical centre virtually next door, I shall be quite happy.

The Gracious Speech also mentions giving

"greater freedom to successful hospitals".

I am not certain what that refers to, but no doubt it has something to do with giving greater freedom to good, successful and probably acute hospitals.

Airedale general hospital is also in my constituency. It is the biggest employer in my constituency, so it is extremely important to me and my constituents. It provides a range of services not only to my constituents, but to people who live as far north in the dales as Bentham, towards Clapham, past Settle and in the other direction, in the constituency of the Under-Secretary of State, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley (Mr. Leslie), as far down as Bingley. The hospital is therefore very well used, and I intend to keep it that way. I do not want anything else to be hived off from it and put into one of the mega-hospitals that seem to be growing in city centres, although I appreciate the facilities that they provide.

A few weeks ago, I opened a new pathology department at Airedale general hospital. It was a real pleasure for me to be there and see the work going on. Today I wanted to highlight the work of that pathology department. Too often, we see the glamorous side of our health service—the surgeons and the big hospitals—but we do not know much about the background work that goes on. I suppose it is the equivalent of the background work that goes on in Select Committees in this place, with the surgeons as the equivalent of the Members who make the big speeches in the Chamber, and even Ministers.

I pay tribute to the work of the pathology department. Various bits of me have gone through it at various times, and I very much appreciated its findings. I will not say that it was lifesaving, but it undoubtedly improved the quality of my life from time to time. I recognise the need for regional centres of excellence, such as the one that we have in Leeds that is part of the Leeds teaching hospitals trust, which is made up of Leeds general infirmary and St. James's hospital.

In the Chamber we do not often speak of our personal experiences, but perhaps we should do so more often. Instead of speaking about myself as a constituency MP and my constituents, I shall touch on the fact that my partner, John, has been struggling with cancer for 15 months now. Two weeks ago—I hope that none of the hon. Members present is too squeamish—he had a liver resection in St. James's. He was diagnosed with that fifth cancer only two weeks before he had his operation, so, yes, there are waiting lists in the health service, but when someone's back is to the wall and he has a cancer in the liver that needs to be removed quickly, it happens. It happened with John, and I can assure the House that it had nothing to do with my position as a Member of Parliament. I am sure that Mr. Lodge, the surgeon, did not know who I was when we went to see him the first time, although he may do so now. It was excellent for us that, within two weeks, John was in St. James's and having the operation.

That was terrific, but we must watch out for too much of the health service gravitating towards city centre hospitals. As I said, I recognise that John had specialist surgery, which clearly cannot be provided in every cottage hospital throughout the country. Specialist services must therefore be provided in city centres, but I warn against too much movement. I want Airedale general hospital in my constituency not just to survive, but to prosper. It is in an attractive part of the Aire valley. If we start to siphon off services from there to the Bradford hospitals or the Leeds hospitals it will endanger my wonderful Airedale general hospital. I do not want that.

Airedale hospital has a great advantage over city centre hospitals, in that nurses, doctors and ancillary staff there can work within a short journey of their home, and that home will be reasonably priced and in a beautiful area of the Aire valley. That means that Airedale has no trouble whatever in recruitment. If we start moving more and more towards city centres, we may start having greater problems with recruitment because people do not want to commute great distances and may not want to live in city centres, although I recognise that Leeds is a wonderful city, which I appreciate.

The Queen's Speech states:

"A Bill will also be introduced to help ensure that local authorities support older people awaiting discharge from hospital."

That is not just about bed blocking; it is also about the quality of life for those who have had surgery in an acute hospital such as St James's. I do not want to knock St James's, but it was built on a small site and it has grown and grown. Ward 63 was where my partner John was with two other men; it is a small room with a window about 1 m by 1 m that overlooks a brick wall. Recovering from a third operation for cancer is about not just one's physical state, but one's mental capacity to recover. The worst part of cancer surgery is the depression that can set in because it is such a difficult period, so it is important not to become depressed.

I really appreciate what was done in St James's. Ten years ago John would have died because we did not have the advantage of MRI scans or lasers, and liver operations could not have been performed. Therefore, I appreciate what has been done, but hospitals are more than operating theatres; they are also places where people recover, so their spirit needs to be uplifted. A wonderful tonic for John would have been a window through which he could see a bit of sky, not just a brick wall. There is not much that can be done about that. For historic reasons, St James's has developed on its present site, which is too small and congested and restricted by factors such as traffic. But health service planners should pay more attention to locations so that there is room for improvement and expansion without putting patients into a ward where they can see nothing.

We need to consider the future of the health service. I am proud of the health service, particularly in my area, but hospitals cannot develop and grow on one small site. We must be aware of the need for a little space. From Airedale general hospital there are wonderful views across the Aire valley. Patients recovering from major surgery would be helped by having a good view across such a valley.

I am proud of the health service, but it could be better. I do not say that small is beautiful because that is not always the case, but there is room in our health service for tiny hospitals such as the Coronation hospital in Ilkley, medium-sized hospitals such as Airedale hospital in the Aire valley, and for huge hospitals such as Jimmy's in Leeds. Let us concentrate on all those areas of the health service. They can all be improved on. Within the health service, we should be able to have a good quality of service in all those three different types of hospitals.

Debate adjourned.—*[Mr. Ainger.]*

Debate to be resumed tomorrow.

North Sea Oil and Gas Industry

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn—*[Mr. Ainger.]*

9.59 pm

Mr. Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland): I should remind the House that my entry in the Register of Members' Interests indicates that earlier this year, I was fortunate enough to receive hospitality and transportation in respect of the offshore northern seas exhibition in Stavanger, which was sponsored by the United Kingdom Offshore Operators Association.

As luck would have it, this is a timely debate for the offshore oil and gas industry. This is a very delicately poised time for the industry, as there is, frankly, the prospect of significant decline. If that prospect is left unchecked, decline could turn into disaster. Much remains to be seen about what can be done by the industry and the Government, not least in partnership together.

The situation has already started to impact in my constituency. At the Sullom Voe terminal in Shetland, there has already been a round of redundancies, and contractors and subcontractors have also started to reduce their numbers. In a community such as Shetland, the loss of jobs from a place such as Sullom Voe has an especially severe impact. These are good, well-paid, skilled and professional jobs. The installation also has significant spin-offs for harbour provision and towage in Shetland. Once such jobs are lost, the people who held them will also tend to leave the community, so the constant drip of depopulation—the great threat that always hangs over communities such as ours—will continue.

There are not many alternatives in Shetland. The local authority, which is one of the other significant local employers, is also looking to cut numbers. After the time I spent in Brussels at the European Commission yesterday, I do not have any confidence that there will be a prospect of employment in the white fish industry for many of the people who are affected. Much of what is happening today was predicted by the industry at the time of the changes made in the Budget and was also referred to at the ONS exhibition earlier this year.

I should say that I am not seeking to visit all the ills of the industry on the Government. In particular, the Budget changes will not clearly be all bad for the industry. I share the conclusion drawn by Professor Alex Kemp of Aberdeen university, my alma mater, at the end of last week when he published his North sea study, occasional paper No. 89, "The Impact of the 2002 Tax Changes on the UK Continental Shelf". I do not know whether the Minister has had the benefit of reading that document. If not, I certainly commend it to him as an excellent piece of academic research. Professor Kemp concludes that older fields and marginal projects within mature fields will benefit, but only as a result of the royalty abolition. That is the first point that I would wish the Minister to address.

The Government are currently undertaking consultation on the abolition of royalty. It might be slightly ungenerous to say this, but although they have been meticulous in their consultation on the abolition of royalty, would that they had taken the same careful

[Mr. Alistair Carmichael]

approach to the introduction of the corporate tax increase in the first place. It is one of those unfortunate things that measures that are of benefit seem to be capable of being introduced only after careful preparation, while those of detriment seem to be much more easily sprung on the industry.

Sir Robert Smith (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine): For the record, I also visited the offshore northern seas exhibition in Stavanger, and I declare an interest as a shareholder in Shell.

I want to reinforce the point about royalties. Many of my constituents and people in the industry have put it to me that abolishing royalties is not simply about the figure, which is not that great in terms of the tax take through the 10 per cent. charge. The crucial point is to fulfil a promise that the Chancellor made and to restore confidence to an industry that suffered the shock of the way in which the tax was originally introduced.

Mr. Carmichael: I agree with my hon. Friend. Abolishing royalty is the thread on which the Government's credibility with the industry hangs. It is important that an announcement is made early. I hope that the Minister can inform us of the consultation's progress and when we might expect a decision.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): Does the hon. Gentleman know that the latest forecast for total exploration wells drilled this year is 12? That is half of last year's total and much less than was expected at the beginning of the year. Does that not show that any tax change that the Government want to introduce should have been accompanied by an incentive for further exploration drilling? The change means not only lost jobs now but lost development and lost tax revenues in future.

Mr. Carmichael: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point. One of my main anxieties is that the package will create imbalance in the industry on the United Kingdom continental shelf. Without money and effort being put into exploration now, there will be no mature fields to benefit in three, five or 10 years' time. I shall consider that in more detail later.

If the abolition of royalties is the silver lining, we should not forget that a dense black cloud surrounds it. The position is producing an imbalance, and there is already evidence of the deferral of investment, which the UKOOA and many Liberal Democrat Members predicted during the Budget debates. I am sure that the Economic Secretary knows that UKOOA's annual survey of 28 UK offshore oil and gas producing companies' investment and development plans was published yesterday. It was undertaken with the Department of Trade and Industry. It describes the current position as having

"reached a critical point in terms of its international competitiveness, with projections of investment growth not being matched by increased production volumes."

The survey says much about the current position in the industry. I want to highlight two statistics in the report. They relate to the point that the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) made. The report states:

"There are 64 fewer new field developments planned for the future compared to last year's survey findings (84 as opposed to 148 in 2001)."

Secondly, the report states:

"Total UK oil and gas production for the period . . . to 2010 is forecast to be an estimated 12.9 billion

barrels of oil equivalent,

"some 370 million boe lower than predicted twelve months ago".

That elegantly illustrates the point of the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan that the Department of Trade and Industry clearly recognises the need to bring new entrants to the UK continental shelf. However, that is hindered by the taxation policy that the Treasury promotes.

The great need in an industry such as offshore oil and gas is for continuity and stability. The overall picture that the UKOOA report painted is of a genuine threat to that. Extraction of oil and gas from the North sea is not quick and easy, but fraught with danger. Before coming to Parliament, I was a solicitor and I dealt with several people who had been injured in offshore accidents, as well as with families of people who had sadly been killed as a result of such accidents. The environment is highly challenging and hostile. Extraction therefore involves a steady stream of work in developing new fields. Investment now will bring benefits in three years' time or well beyond that period.

There are other anomalies that need to be addressed. One particular concern for me—I hope that the Minister may have something to say about it when he replies—is the taxation on tariff income deriving from the use of infrastructure. It is a curious position. For mature fields with pipelines coming in from Miller, for example, there is 70 per cent. taxation. For newer non-taxable fields, it is now at 40 per cent. For brand new pipelines such as those that would be bringing gas into this country from Norway, to hark back to the ONS exhibition at Stavanger, the Minister for Energy and Construction was keen to trumpet the signing of a concordat with the Norwegian Government to make this a reality—the tariff on these pipelines is to be taxed at 30 per cent.

I believe that damage has been done to the industry by the taxation increases in the Budget. When historians come to review this period, I think that they will come to the view that the real damage was done by the Government. I shall hark back to some of Professor Kemp's estimates. I believe that he estimates that the peak of the tax take will be £1 billion barely this year, and thereafter it will be on a declining tariff. Given the loss of confidence in the Government among the industry and the damage that they have done to the long-term prospects for the offshore industry on the UK continental shelf, it may ultimately be seen to have been an expensive filling of a gap in a Budget. It is all so regrettable because it is all so unnecessary. The Government's standing had been increasing since 1997. The manner in which they operated the pilot project was exemplary. All that was thrown away on one afternoon.

The industry considers that the real villain of the piece is the Treasury. That is why I framed my application for an Adjournment debate in a way that meant that we might have a Treasury Minister rather than a Minister

from the Department of Trade and Industry to respond to it. I canvass the idea that there is a need for Treasury Ministers to be involved at the highest level of PILOT. I understand that currently only DTI Ministers are involved, although I understand that the sub-groups involved officials from the Treasury. If there is to be a repairing of the relations between the industry and the Government—it is crucial that there is—that would be the most obvious first step.

It is my real concern that the full effects of the changes in taxation that arise from the Budget are not yet apparent. First, I am concerned that the changes may have a bearing on the health and safety of workers in the industry. It seems almost inevitable, that from a mainland perspective, operators in the North sea are out of sight and out of mind; they are working in tighter margins, and on older fields there will be pressure to compromise on safety. We all know the dire consequences that that can have. I lived in Orkney at the time of the Piper Alpha disaster and I well remember the accommodation module being brought in to the Flotta terminal to be opened. That will remain with me for the rest of my life. We can have no compromise on safety in the North sea because it can be disastrous in human terms.

My other concern is about the working time directive, from which the offshore oil and gas industry is exempt. The unions are pressing to have it applied to the industry. I broadly favour that, because I do not see why in principle offshore workers should be treated differently from anybody else, but as long as the margins are squeezed as they are at present and as long as there is an imbalance in the industry—with the emphasis on mature fields and not on developing new ones—I can see little prospect of its happening. I am anxious to give the Minister time to answer the points that I have made, so I shall conclude my remarks.

10.16 pm

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (John Healey): I congratulate the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Carmichael) on securing the debate and I applaud the reasoned and well argued way in which he presented his case. This short debate cannot do justice to the issues that he raises, nor the interest of other hon. Members, including the hon. Members for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) and for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine (Sir R. Smith).

The Government are completely committed to maintaining an active oil and gas industry in the UK and to promoting the futufe development of the nation's oil and gas resources. The moves that we have made since 1997, including the tax changes in this year's Budget, underline that commitment. The oil and gas industry task force, established in 1998, was an early and strong commitment to the industry. Its work continues through PILOT, which we set up in January and which the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland mentioned. I welcome his stress on the importance of that industry-Government partnership. No doubt PILOT will consider two of the issues that he mentioned, because the working time directive and health and safety concerns are meat and drink to such a forum.

The Treasury has always been, and will remain, fully engaged with PILOT's work. We will remain so because that body reflects the importance that the Government attach to the oil and gas industry within the wider economy, in terms of jobs, investment and contribution to the national income.

The hon. Gentleman outlined some of the difficulties and challenges that companies face in the North sea, including high costs and lower production levels. Those are classic characteristics of a mature industry and it is those problems that PILOT has been designed to help companies overcome. PILOT is looking to the long term, and the new tax regime—the subject of the debate—does the same. The changes are designed to provide certainty for the industry, by removing the element of fiscal risk, and to create the right investment incentives by introducing 100 per cent. first-year reliefs for virtually all North sea capital investment and by removing the old royalty system entirely.

I reject the suggestion that those changes were rushed or introduced without preparation. I remind the hon. Gentleman that the Government's first Budget, in 1997, announced the review of the North sea fiscal regime. The pre-Budget report that year stated:

"Following the announcement, there has been wide consultation with the oil industry about the existing fiscal regime."

A 1998 Budget press release confirmed that the Government would

"formally consult the oil industry on specific proposals for change to the North Sea fiscal regime."

The accompanying press release outlined a consultation document, with the options of extending the petroleum revenue tax or introducing the surcharge tax.

We confirmed that we would not go ahead later that year, because of the lower oil prices, but two years later, in the pre-Budget report speech, the Chancellor made this clear:

"It has been put to me that North sea oil companies earning higher profits from higher oil prices should be subject to special taxes, but I can tell the House that I am determined not to make short-term decisions based on short-term factors."—[*Official Report*, 8 November 2000; Vol. 356, c. 317.]

In his 2001 Budget speech, he said:

"As we consider the next steps for taxation in the North sea, our approach will be guided not by short-term factors but by the need for a regime that raises a fair share of revenue and promotes long-term investment in the North sea."—[*Official Report*, 7 March 2001; Vol. 364, c. 299.]

That is exactly what the Chancellor announced a year later in this year's Budget. Frankly, it gives the lie to the idea that, somehow, the changes to the tax regime were a surprise or that they were made without any consideration for or sufficient consultation with the industry.

I also reject the hon. Gentleman's argument that the industry cannot afford the changes and that investment will suffer, because last year, even after investing £4 billion, oil companies generated a net cash flow of £10 billion from the North sea, even after all the taxes they had paid. The pre-tax rate of return in the North sea oil industry, as the hon. Gentleman knows, is a massive 21 per cent.—double that, generally, of other industries.

Also, in post-tax terms, we see a significant difference compared with other sectors in recent years, so I reject the arguments that the changes cannot be afforded and that investment will suffer under the new regime. I have read Professor Kemp's report and the speech that he

[John Healey]

gave on Friday. I have also received a communication from him on the very issue. In a sense, the hon. Gentleman misrepresents his point about royalties, because he states very clearly that

"my research clearly shows that the 100 per cent. capital allowances and royalty abolition help investment in incremental projects in old fields, and 100 per cent. capital allowances help new fields of very modest profitability. Thus the changes make the tax system more progressive in relation to oil price and cost changes."

Mr. Salmond: I welcome the mention of Professor Kemp, because, as the Minister knows and as the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland said specifically, Professor Kemp is also very concerned about the differential taxation of gas infrastructure. Has the Minister had the opportunity to consider that issue specifically, bearing in mind the under-utilisation of large existing structures, and, from a Treasury point of view, the fact that if new structures are built, perhaps unnecessarily, they will attract substantial capital allowances? For the Treasury and for the environment, would it not be a good idea to tax existing gas infrastructure fairly?

John Healey: The hon. Gentleman asks whether I have considered the issue. I have. I have also considered the work that the joint UK-Norway group has been doing on the question. I shall come to that later, because it was raised by the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland.

The starting point for the debate—an important reference point—is the fact that the North sea is accepted as a maturing oil region. Most major North sea finds are past their peak and overall production is beginning to decline. However, the UK still offers some good opportunities, although it is widely recognised that their nature has changed. As Beverley Mentzer, chair of the United Kingdom Offshore Operators Association fiscal policy group, said in relation to yesterday's report launch:

"Managing a business as production declines requires different application of the skills and disciplines that have been successful during the growth of the UK continental shelf in the first half of its life".

There is also general agreement that costs in the North sea are high by international standards. Average development costs are about $4 a barrel and operating costs are about the same, so that tax regime must, and now does, recognise that combination of high costs and a maturing sector.

We had two principal objectives for tax in the North sea: the regime must ensure that there are sufficient incentives to invest in a maturing industry and that the nation receives a fair share of the profits being generated by companies from a finite natural national resource. Every major oil-producing country has a special tax regime to reflect the economics of its oil industry and ensure that their country shares in its benefits.

The tax rates, moreover, had to be both credible and sustainable, and they had to remain competitive. The rates we have introduced are lower than those in all other major oil and gas producing nations—significantly lower in most cases—but we wanted to do more than keep the rates low. We also wanted a regime that recognised that the changing nature of the North sea. A tax regime should be designed to meet the challenges of the future, high costs and shrinking field sizes. Above all, it should provide the best possible help for future marginal North sea projects, to encourage both new field developments and incremental developments in the larger but older fields.

Building on the existing 100 per cent. relief for exploration, we have provided full and immediate relief for virtually all North sea capital expenditure, including the exploration drilling about which the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) is concerned. That is a significant move, and it has taken a while for the full impact to begin to sink in. I welcome the assertion of the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland that the changes are "not all bad", and I regard that as a step forward.

The hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland. quoted some figures from the UKOAA survey, whose findings were published yesterday. Let me quote some more, because I think the early signs are encouraging. Although the findings were published yesterday, the survey was undertaken after the tax changes in the Budget.

Capital development spend this year is expected to meet the forecast made last year, before the Budget tax changes. More projects are under consideration in mature fields this year: the figure is up from 96 in 2001 to 144. Capital expenditure over the period to 2010 is forecast to be more than £23 billion, an increase of more than £1 billion on last year's forecast and since the Budget changes.

Mr. Carmichael: Will the Minister give way?

John Healey: I want to respond to the points made by the hon. Gentleman.

Let me turn to the question of the tax on infrastructure. I am aware of the work of the joint UK-Norway group, which has been helpful so far, and I shall encourage Treasury officials to discuss the matter further; but, like all tax issues, it is clearly a matter for the Chancellor and the Budget. We will treat any representations accordingly.

The Chancellor also committed the Government to abolishing royalty in its entirety. It is widely acknowledged to be regressive: it is ripe for the axe, and it will be axed. I welcome confirmation from the hon. Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine that in his view abolition will reinforce confidence in the industry. It makes economic sense. The consultation ended last month; the date for abolition will be announced soon, when the results of that consultation have been fully analysed.

Royalty can damage new investment in older fields—the very investment in the North sea that now needs to be encouraged. That is important not just to extend the life of existing fields, but because their infrastructure will play a key role in serving other future fields and developments. Without that infrastructure, many new smaller prospects may not be developed at all.

UK tax rates remain below those of all other major oil and gas-producing nations, and immediate relief for virtually all North sea capital investment is available, so I reject the argument that the North sea oil regime is uncompetitive. The UK remains an attractive place in which to invest.

We now have a principled and sustainable fiscal regime for the North sea, which combines maximum incentives for investment with a sensible marginal rate of tax on the profits from a finite valuable national resource. It is right for the next stage of the industry's development, it provides a new fiscal stability which will continue into the next Parliament, and it underlines the UK Government's continuing strong commitment to the North sea oil and gas industry.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at twenty-nine minutes past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 14 November 2002

The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Business of the House

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): May I ask the Leader of the House to give us the business for next week?

The Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Robin Cook): Mr. Speaker, you informed the House yesterday of the subjects for debate on the Queen's Speech. The business thereafter will be as follows:

MONDAY 18 NOVEMBER TO WEDNESDAY 20 NOVEMBER—Continuation and conclusion of the debate on the Queen's Speech.

THURSDAY 21 NOVEMBER—Motion to take note of various European documents relating to fisheries policy followed by a motion on the membership of the Committee of Selection.

FRIDAY 22 NOVEMBER—The House will not be sitting.

The provisional business for the following week will include:

MONDAY 25 NOVEMBER—There will be a debate on the UN Security Council resolution on Iraq.

TUESDAY 26 NOVEMBER—Second Reading of the Regional Assemblies (Preparations) Bill.

WEDNESDAY 27 NOVEMBER—Second Reading of the Health (Wales) Bill.

THURSDAY 28 NOVEMBER—Second Reading of the Community Care (Delayed Discharges etc.) Bill.

FRIDAY 29 NOVEMBER—The House will not be sitting.

The House will also wish to know that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer will deliver his pre-Budget report on Wednesday 27 November.

I should also like to inform the House that the business in Westminster Hall for the next two weeks will be:

THURSDAY 21 NOVEMBER—Debate on further education.

THURSDAY 28 NOVEMBER—Debate on the report from the Transport, Local Government and the Regions Committee on the 10-year plan for transport.

Mr. Forth: I thank the Leader of the House for letting us have the future business.

Will the Leader of the House clarify an element of one our new procedures that has just started—written ministerial statements? The Order Paper contains a list of 10 such statements. I have checked with both the Table Office and the Vote Office, and also the Library, and I have found that the only place where I can locate one of those written statements is the Library, where there is indeed a brief written ministerial reply on bus fuel duty rebate and biodiesel. I have searched in vain for the other statements.

I wonder whether it is a coincidence that 10 written ministerial statements are conveniently to be made on a Thursday and that, as we speak at 11.36 am, only one of them has appeared in the House that I can find. Is there to be a proper procedure for such statements? Will the House be apprised of them at a proper time during the day, so that hon. Members can decide what they wish to do with or to them, or do I detect some sort of jiggery-pokery, in which a flood of statements will appear as late as possible on a Thursday when the House is not sitting on the Friday, so that they cannot be taken up by hon. Members for several days? I hope that we can be assured that that will not happen, that the Leader has a tight grip on this matter and that he can guarantee that the system will be dealt with properly, so that the House can properly deal with such matters.

Has any progress been made on additional time for Northern Ireland matters and questions in particular, as well as for questions to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister? Those two Departments cover huge areas of responsibility. The Deputy Prime Minister's portfolio is appropriately broad and Northern Ireland matters are now dealt with directly by five Ministers in this House. Is the Leader of the House aware of any progress in allocating more time to hon. Members to question Northern Ireland Ministers and the Deputy Prime Minister?

Will the Leader of the House also tell us whether we will get a resolution ensuring that the House can approve the proposed dates for private Members' Bills and other matters relating to the workings of the House? I gather that it is difficult to make progress on such matters, including ten-minute Bills and others, until a resolution is passed by the House. I hope that he can give me some encouragement or further information, as everybody is very anxious to get on with things.

I should like to refer to a tantalising phrase in the Gracious Speech:

> "My Government looks forward to considering the report from the Joint Committee on House of Lords Reform."

You will recall, Mr. Speaker, as will all hon. Members, that House of Lords reform was going to be one of the great flagships of this Government. We were told that the Government were outraged by the fact that the House of Lords was undemocratic and unaccountable. We were led to believe that the exciting new Labour Government would reform the upper House. However, five or more years on, we are simply told that they look forward to considering a report from a Joint Committee. That conveys no urgency except in the sense of mañana. I hope that the Leader of the House will tell us what is in the Government's mind. Will the issue be left to drift rudderless between a Joint Committee and both Houses, or will the Government act? We are entitled to know. Has the matter been shelved because the Prime Minister likes an all-appointed House and finds it convenient to continue to deal with it?

Did the Leader of the House watch "The Project" on television recently? I wonder whether he was disappointed that he did not feature much in the triumph of new Labour. Perhaps he will provide an

[Mr. Forth]

opportunity for screenings in the House, so that Labour Members can ascertain whether they featured in it and gain inspiration from it to assess the way in which to get on in the new Labour party. That programme performed an important public service and could provide a similar service to Labour Members of Parliament.

Mr. Cook: I welcome the fact that the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) is in his place and asking questions. Given the Conservative party's reduced strength, it is perplexing that it is not fielding one of its best performers in this year's debate on the Queen's Speech. It is the first occasion since I entered the House on which the shadow Leader of the House has been excluded from the Queen's Speech line-up. We enjoy hearing the right hon. Gentleman so much that I hope that it will be not only the first occasion but the last, and that the party will restore him to the Dispatch Box when we discuss the next Queen's Speech.

The right hon. Gentleman was characteristically quick off the mark to condemn the absence of the other nine written statements a mere six minutes into the sitting. I shall make inquiries as soon as we leave the Chamber and try to ensure that the other statements appear at the House's convenience. However, I robustly resist the perhaps unintentional implication that Thursday is somehow a second-class day in the House's proceedings. I thoroughly enjoy my Thursdays; they are one of the highlights of the week. I therefore have no difficulty in defending the practice of putting down a statement on a Thursday. [HON. MEMBERS: "Where are they?"] We are now 11 minutes into the sitting, and there is a long way to go. We are in a better position than in the old days of the planted question. None would have been answered by now, yet one written statement has already been provided.

On the questions rota, I am conscious of the desire for more time to discuss some subjects. I am acutely aware of the need to provide adequate coverage of Northern Ireland affairs. My difficulty is familiar: although I have demands for more time for some subjects, I am short of demands for less time on others. Unless we can find room, it is difficult to expand the time for some subjects without that being at the expense of others.

On private Members' Bills, I am happy to assure the right hon. Gentleman that the motion is on the Order Paper under "Remaining Orders and Notices". It sets out dates, and I believe that the ballot will be held next Thursday. I am conscious of the importance that hon. Members attach to proceeding on the matter, and we want to make good speed.

I am not a member of the Joint Committee, but I am informed that my right hon. Friend the Member for Copeland (Dr. Cunningham) is writing its interim report even as we sit. We anticipate receiving it before Christmas. It will set out the options for reform and I hope that the House will have an opportunity to choose between them on a free vote. I am bound to say that that is a much better way of proceeding than for the Government to state that they had decided not to wait on the Joint Committee but to go ahead with their proposals. If we had done that, the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst would have denounced us for not waiting for the report. It is a bit rich of him to complain that we have not made enough progress in five years. I remind him that we have broken the hereditary principle in the Second Chamber. That had not been done in the previous 100 years. And the right hon. Gentleman opposed that when we tried to effect it in the previous Parliament.

I regret that my onerous duties and my responsibilities to the House and on the Queen's Speech prevent me from watching television as much I would wish—

Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): My right hon. Friend will not buy a TV licence.

Mr. Cook: I am pleased to assure my hon. Friend that I am up to speed on that.

I am always delighted when the media pass over me; it is my ambition to appear gratuitously in the media as little as possible. I am happy to say, and it may help to put the right hon. Gentleman's comments in perspective, that I am advised that that programme's ratings plummeted between the first and second episodes, which shows once again that the public outside often have greater wisdom than the official Opposition.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): The right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) referred to a sense of mañana in relation to House of Lords reform. In Cornwall we have the expression "dreckly", which is like mañana only without the sense of urgency. As it has taken 90 years to reach this point, during which for a considerable portion of time there was a Conservative Administration, the Opposition cannot be redeemed from the accusation of being slow off the mark on the issue of House of Lords reform.

The Leader of the House may recall—I hope that he does—that this was the first time that the Queen has referred in her Speech to pre-legislative scrutiny, and I pay tribute to the Leader of the House and our Committee for that. How are the candidates for pre-legislative scrutiny to be selected? For example, we already know about three draft Bills—on housing, nuclear energy and corruption, the last of which I think is intended to encompass some form of company law—but is it also intended that some issues that have been addressed in the recent past but are not in the Queen's Speech, such as mental health and company pension legislation, may also be candidates for pre-legislative scrutiny during the coming Session? In addition, is it intended that some of the most complicated Bills, such as those relating to antisocial behaviour, planning, and criminal justice, which has huge implications, may be candidates for pre-legislative scrutiny?

Will the Leader of the House address the point that consultation by Government, before we come to legislation, is no substitute for consultation by Parliament when we start to have the proposals put before us? By what mechanisms will measures be selected for pre-legislative scrutiny and agreed?

Mr. Cook: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for introducing "dreckly" to the parliamentary lexicon. I am sure that it will come in useful on occasions when we require further time for reflection, and I shall bear it in mind.

I welcome the hon. Gentleman's appreciation of the fact that the Queen's Speech for the first time reflects the value of pre-legislative scrutiny, and he will know the importance that I attach to that. I hope, during the next week, to have consultations with him and the shadow Leader of the House to discuss the shape of the year, and in the course of that we may discuss what may be appropriate candidates for draft Bills and publications.

The Mental Health Bill has already been published in draft, there is now quite a degree of public debate as a result of the proposals in the draft text, and the Departments are reflecting on that. We intend to bring that forward as an official Bill at some point in the course of the Session, but it is obviously important that the present stage be spent reflecting on the reaction to the draft Bill.

I would not myself have thought that it would be sensible for us to produce the two important Bills that form the core of this Session on crime and antisocial behaviour as draft Bills. Those are Bills that we shall want to make progress on so that we can ensure that we modernise the criminal justice system so that it adequately reflects the needs of the victim and meets our objective of trying to ensure that our citizens can walk the streets in safety. We cannot therefore hold out any prospect of having those Bills in draft, but I hope that by the end of the Session we will have seen a significant increase in the volume of draft legislation.

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): May I ask the Leader of the House for some help in dealing with the Executive in relation to how they organise debates involving Select Committees? The Education and Skills Committee was apportioned a debate next Thursday to deal with higher education and higher education finance. We wrote a report, many months ago now, on that subject and, for understandable reasons, the Government have consistently asked us to delay the deadline and we have reasonably said that we understand the situation and will do so, so we are not being unreasonable there. But at 10 o'clock today we were told that the debate we were to lead next Thursday on higher education has been substituted not by a Select Committee debate, but by a Government debate on further education from which my Committee will be excluded in any official role. Moreover, there is no hint of any compensation of another day on a future occasion. That seems a strange way for the Executive to treat this legislature and House of Commons.

Mr. Cook: This seems to be exactly the sort of occasion on which the word "dreckly" may come in handy. If I may say so, my hon. Friend is aware that the Government are committed to producing a higher education funding review and, as I understand it, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Skills has committed himself to publishing that review early in the new year. Plainly, it is sensible for everybody—the Select Committee and Members of the House included—for the debate to be held in the light of the Government's review, which will contain a number of options on which the House and my hon. Friend's Committee will wish to comment. In the meantime, I assure him that nobody is excluded from next Thursday's debate. Indeed, I very much hope that his Select Committee will play a vigorous part in it.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): May we have a statement from the Deputy Prime Minister on the Government's attitude to the outcome of major planning inquiries? The Dibden bay inquiry is coming to its conclusion after a full year of examining an extremely controversial proposal to build a massive container port on the edge of what is about to become a new national park, so surely it would be invidious if the planning inquiry found against building the port only for the Government to overrule that finding for political reasons. If we can have a statement, that would be most valued; otherwise, any such overruling would make nonsense of the planning inquiry process and all the money spent on such inquiries.

Mr. Cook: I am surprised to hear the hon. Gentleman suggest that the Government have overruled the outcome of the inquiry. Before he waxes too indignant in denouncing the Government for taking a course of action, he at least owes them the courtesy of waiting until they have taken it. The Government have a high respect for the planning inquiry system, but we are of course concerned that the current system involves unnecessary delay for developers and objectors, which is why we will have lots of opportunity during this Session to discuss the planning process.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Regarding the business for Monday 25 November and the United Nations and Iraq, will any substantive motion be tabled to enable Members—every one of us—either to endorse or not to endorse military action in the middle east that could open Pandora's box?

Mr. Cook: As I announced, the debate will be on the UN Security Council resolution on Iraq. I anticipate that it will take place on a substantive motion on that theme.

Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory (Wells): I go to Brussels almost every week, sent by the House as one of its two representatives on the convention on the future of Europe. I listen to the Government representative making some pretty remarkable policy changes, such as his recent acceptance that the charter of fundamental rights should become legally binding, which would have huge constitutional and legal implications and, indeed, implications for the power of the House.

Will the Leader of the House therefore organise a debate on the convention in the Chamber, because the Standing Committee on the Convention, welcome though it is, represents only an opportunity for me and others to exchange views with other Members? The Government are not represented in those discussions. Will he organise a debate on the convention, which reports next year, so that the Government can bring the House up to date on their new-found policy positions?

Mr Cook: First, I understand that a working paper on the charter of rights has been brought before the convention. There are a number of options and we

[Mr. Cook]

certainly accept that paper as a basis for further discussion, but no selection has yet been made among those options.

I very much welcome the right hon. Gentleman's new-found enthusiasm for regular visits to Brussels and I hope that they have a cultural impact on his approach to the rest of the continent; but on accountability, the Government have innovated in the House by setting up the Standing Committee on the Convention, which has enabled him and his colleague who represents the House on the convention to report on it. They represent the House and are present as Back-Bench Members, as it was thought appropriate on all sides that the matter was one for Back-Bench participation. Of course I understand the interest in the subject and I very much welcome the interest that the right hon. Gentleman is showing in the future of Europe. I shall certainly try to find an opportunity for it to be shared with the wider community.

Andrew Mackinlay: May I invite the Leader of the House to reflect on the representations made by my hon. Friend the Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) about Select Committees? One of the reforms that he can leave as a legacy as Leader of the House is guaranteeing and reserving slots for Select Committee debates, and handing stewardship and decisions as to which subject should be allocated to the Chairman of the Liaison Committee. That would be fair and would offer a guarantee. Days for Select Committee debates are entitled to as much deference as those days that are offered and made available, rightly, to the Opposition parties. It should not be a matter for the Executive to decide. I hope that he will reflect upon that.

The Select Committee on Foreign Affairs recently had a slot in Westminster Hall on the war against terrorism but so much water had gone under the bridge since its report was published that we did not discuss the report; it was no longer directly relevant. I hope the Leader of he House will consider that point.

Can the Leader of the House give us some opportunity to discuss the running of this place? Some things are not a matter for the Leader of the House but are delegated to Committees, and we have no opportunity for asking, probing and making representations. By way of example, there is a clutter of statues of Prime Ministers in this place. Soon there will not be enough room to stand up—and they were not the greatest parliamentarians. I want to see statues of Daniel O'Connell, Charles Stewart Parnell, Bradlaugh and the Red Clydesiders. That is who we should be recognising.

What is more, those red-and-white and green-and-white tents on the Terrace would never get planning permission. It is gross hypocrisy on the part of this place. Barry and Pugin did not design this building with those tents. It is time they came down.

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend is in revolutionary mode this morning and I will take that as a bid for a plinth to be reserved for him in the Members Lobby.

I take seriously the importance of making sure that we debate those reports that are recommended by the Liaison Committee. My hon. Friend will have heard that in my statement I committed us to having a debate on the report by the Select Committee on Transport on the 10-year transport plan. As I recall, that report did not necessarily make comfortable reading for the Government, which shows that we are not afraid of having robust debate when Select Committees publish critical reports.

On the arrangements for the statues outside, my hon. Friend may wish to pursue that matter with my hon. Friend the Member for one of the Newham seats—I forget which one.

Andrew Mackinlay: West Ham.

Mr. Cook: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. My hon. Friend the Member for West Ham (Mr. Banks) is Chairman of the Advisory Committee on Works of Art and has ambitious ideas for bringing other Prime Ministers into the Members Lobby, on which there may be divided views. I am sure that we could have a very entertaining full day's debate, if I can find the time, on the respective merits of Lady Thatcher and Daniel O'Connell for a plinth in the Members Lobby.

Sir George Young (North-West Hampshire): Given the powers that the Government now have to carry Bills over from one Session to the next, and given the ambitious programme announced yesterday and our desire for certainty, can the right hon. Gentleman take the House into his confidence and say which of those Bills he anticipates being introduced late in the Session and subject to carry-over?

Mr. Cook: As the right hon. Gentleman will recall, we committed ourselves when the resolution was passed on 29 October to consultation with other parties and I look forward to having those discussions in the next week. I am sure that hon. Members who come to them will wish to share what is said with their parties. At the present time, I would not wish to go further than what was said in the Queen's Speech.

On the issue of carry-over, the right hon. Gentleman rightly points out that carry-over will be a meaningful concept only for those Bills that may be introduced late in the Session. It is rather early in the day to name which Bills may be introduced then.

Rob Marris (Wolverhampton, South-West): I was pleased to note in the Gracious Speech that legislative proposals will be brought forward on the Cullen inquiry proposals. I was disappointed to note that no proposals have been brought forward on corporate manslaughter. Can the Leader of the House indicate when legislative proposals on corporate manslaughter are likely to be before the House?

Mr. Cook: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising that point because it gives me the opportunity to correct some of the reports that I read in the media saying that the fact that such proposals are not in the Queen's Speech means that they have been dropped from the Government's programme. The House has just heard the Queen's Speech for the second Session of a four-year Parliament. The absence of any particular measure from that Queen's Speech does not mean that it has been dropped from the legislative programme for a full

Parliament. I hope that the House will not fall into the trap which so many of those in the media wish to dig for us, in implying that anything that comes in the third Session is of third order priority. It is a full Parliament. Each year, we will have a full Session—[HON. MEMBERS: "You said four years."] It will be a full Parliament of possibly five but certainly four Sessions. Perhaps at next week's business statement the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst may like to ask for the date of the next general election; he will get the answer "directly".

On the question of corporate manslaughter, I advise my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-West (Rob Marris) not to despair of the prospect that legislation may well be introduced in a future Session.

Pete Wishart (North Tayside): Given that only four out of the 19 Bills announced in the Queen's Speech apply to Scotland, will the Leader of the House and his right hon. and hon. Friends who represent Scottish constituencies continue to troop through the Lobbies and vote on issues which have no relevance to their constituencies and absolutely no bearing whatsoever on the people they are supposed to be down here to represent?

Mr. Cook: On this there is a clear difference of view between the hon. Gentleman and myself. I come here as a full member of the UK Parliament and I fully intend to carry out all my responsibilities in that role. On the question of Scottish legislation, the hon. Gentleman wanted devolution; he now has it. The Scottish Parliament has passed well over 40 Acts—far more than we might have anticipated in the context of Westminster—and the volume of Scottish legislation that can now be passed by that devolved Parliament fully underlines the value of devolution and the extent to which it can respond to the needs of the people of Scotland.

Mr. John Battle (Leeds, West): May I urge my right hon. Friend in this new parliamentary Session to make time for a full debate on compensation for victims of asbestos pollution in Britain? In recent months, the voluntary liquidation of asbestos polluting companies has meant that hundreds of victims in Armley in my constituency are denied compensation awarded to them by the courts. Furthermore, some major insurance companies are now claiming that they had not covered those companies in the first place. Can we have a full debate with a full Government response to tackle this matter before many more claimants, tragically, die?

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend raises a serious matter. I fully understand the gravity of the issue in his constituency for those individuals, and their relatives, who are affected by companies going into voluntary liquidation without meeting their obligations. I certainly appreciate the importance of this matter and will draw it to the attention of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. I also encourage my hon. Friend to find ways in which he can pursue the matter to the benefit of his constituents. It sounds as if it is exactly the kind of issue for which we created the Westminster Hall debates.

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): Will the Leader of the House encourage a Treasury Minister to make a statement to the House on EC insurance directive 73/239, which is of particular importance to Lloyd's names? The right hon. Gentleman will be aware that the European Commission has now commenced infraction proceedings against the Government. Before these proceedings started, the Government declined to put into the public domain exchanges between the Government and the Commission on the ground that the discussions were then informal. Now that the matter is in a formal arena, with infraction proceedings having started, both the Government and the Commission have invoked the EC privacy rule. It is about time that hon. Members were able to question Ministers about the proceedings that are now under way.

Mr. Cook: I am always open to invitations to encourage my ministerial colleagues in the Treasury and will draw to their attention the remarks of the hon. Lady, but I would be very unwise to make any comment without first consulting the Law Officers and the legal advice that has been received by the Treasury.

Dr. Brian Iddon (Bolton, South-East): My right hon. Friend must be aware by now that many hon. Members have been receiving unsolicited and highly offensive pornography via the parliamentary network. The worst comes via a method called HTML—or hypertext markup language—which means that if that e-mail is accidentally opened, page after page of highly offensive material is displayed on the screen without any mechanism for switching it off. For more than six months now, many hon. Members have tried to stop this through the usual channels, but have failed. Can my right hon. Friend lend a hand and ask the network to purchase the necessary filters that will stop this?

Mr. Cook: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend about the offensiveness of the material. We should remember that this is not simply a matter for Members of the House who may be exposed to the material. It is also a matter for those who work for us, such as secretaries and assistants who may encounter it more frequently, many of whom find it to be highly offensive. I am pleased to say that this matter was discussed at this week's meeting of the Speaker's Panel and I understand that the decision has been taken to acquire the necessary filter mechanism to make sure that hon. Members are protected and that our constituents are protected from the misuse of channels of communication that are there to enable Members to respond to their correspondence and to serve their constituents promptly.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): I thank the Leader of the House for his gracious letter welcoming me back to the performances of the business statement repertory company, which are certainly a parliamentary highlight of the week. Further to the Leader of the House's reply to my right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth), may I reiterate the request for an early debate on Lords reform as the prelude to the

[Mr. John Bercow]

publication of a Bill for a democratically elected second Chamber, such Bill to be published within the next 12 months and on the understanding that a second Chamber that enjoyed political authority and democratic legitimacy alike could offer the prospect of restraining the insatiable legislative appetite of this House?

Mr. Cook: I welcome back the hon. Gentleman and say that his Front Bench's loss is the business statement's gain. Listening to some of his colleagues who are sitting beside him, I am not sure that he has found the most plausible way of getting back to the Front Bench. I detect a degree of dissent to his proposition.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): Not at all.

Mr. Cook: I am delighted to see that there is division on both sides of the argument among the Opposition on the matter. I can assure the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) that there will be debates on the issue and that when we receive the Joint Committee's interim report, the matter will have to be debated extensively and voted on in this House. Whatever reform we propose for the second Chamber, it must provide that Chamber with the legitimacy to work as our partner in a modern and effective Parliament.

Dr. Evan Harris (Oxford, West and Abingdon): The Leader of the House is in the process of devising a statutory instrument to provide for pension sharing in the statutory public sector pension scheme concerning Members of this House. He may remember that, in proposing that measure, I was at pains to point out that there were other statutory public sector pension schemes with much less well paid people who were desperate for the change. Will he accept that when he publishes that statutory instrument, there should be a rider, bringing it into force only after the same provisions have been made for pension sharing for unmarried partners for the less well paid members of those public sector pension schemes?

Mr. Cook: We have had exchanges along these lines before. The hon. Gentleman, with passion, tabled his amendment during our debate on the report on pay and pensions of the Senior Salaries Review Body in the summer of 2001. The House was persuaded by his amendment that we should amend our pension scheme accordingly, and voted accordingly. However, the House was voting on our scheme. The hon. Gentleman does not make it any easier for us to implement his amendment by constantly saying that it should be implemented only if it is applied across the whole of the public sector.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): The Government will shortly announce their conclusions on local government finance, an incredibly important matter to all of our constituents. So far the House has had only four hours to discuss these proposals and each Member was limited to eight minutes. Will the Leader ensure that when the Government finally make their decision on the matter, the House will have a full day's debate so that we can talk about the way in which this affects services in our constituencies?

Mr. Cook: I am conscious of the interests of the House in the matter, which is precisely why we provided not only one day for debate—which, unfortunately, for reasons beyond our control, was then narrowed by the statements that were necessary on that day—but another opportunity for the debate to continue. The fact that Members were confined to eight minutes was a reflection of the substantial interest in the issue and the very large number of hon. Members who wished to take part. We seriously tried to provide the opportunity for the House to express its view before final decisions were taken.

Of course I shall reflect upon what the hon. Gentleman said on the question of what time there might be to debate the matter in the future, but I remind the House that there is strong competition for debating time in the months immediately in front of us. As a result of the bold and ambitious legislative programme that the House heard yesterday, there will be a large number of Second Reading debates over the next few weeks and it is important that we give them priority.

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire): Will the Leader of the House find time for an early debate on the law on human organs and tissues, so that Ministers can explain why there was no commitment in the Gracious Speech to legislation on the subject? He will recall that, on 30 January 2001, the chief medical officer said in response to the Alder Hey and related reports that the Human Tissues Act 1961 should be amended as a matter of urgency. The issue is extremely important to my constituents in Addenbrooke's hospital organ retention support group, and it is disappointing that Ministers have not seen fit to act in this Session.

Mr. Cook: Without giving a specific commitment on the legislation to which the hon. Gentleman refers, let me remind the House of the clear convention relating to the Queen's Speech, that we will certainly implement all the measures set out in it within the current Session, but that that does not mean that all the measures that we will introduce were heralded in it. He may want to reflect on the sentence,

"Other measures will be laid before you."

Norman Lamb (North Norfolk): When can we expect a ministerial statement on the United Nations panel of experts' report on the illegal exploitation of natural resources in the Democratic Republic of the Congo? The report talks of a multi-billion dollar corporate theft of the country's resources and names 12 British-based companies and individuals for violating Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development guidelines on ethical matters. Some of the companies feel strongly that they have been named without evidence, but in respect of others—I mention John Bredenkamp in particular—there appears to be pretty damning evidence. The Government have said that they have asked for further information from the UN and that a substantive response is expected. When can we expect to see that?

Mr. Cook: The hon. Gentleman refers to what is one of the great tragedies of international relations: the fact

that the Congo has immense wealth but that its mineral resources are being used to keep the country in a state of conflict, which impoverishes it, rather than to develop it in the interests of its own people. We have tried to work hard to get momentum behind the peace process, and there has recently been an encouraging withdrawal from the Congo of troops from neighbouring countries. It is important that the commercial sector, as well as neighbouring countries, plays its part in ensuring that the wealth of the Congo is used for its people and not exploited to deprive them.

I shall certainly draw the hon. Gentleman's remarks to the attention of my right hon. Friends the Foreign Secretary and the Secretary of State for International Development and ensure that we communicate with him as soon as we have that further information from the United Nations.

Fire Dispute

12.12 pm

The Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. John Prescott): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I would like to make a statement on the present national fire service strike. The Government believe the strike to be wrong, unnecessary and unreasonable. I last made a statement to the House on Tuesday 22 October, when I set out the history of the dispute and undertook to keep the House informed.

The House will recall that the Fire Brigades Union's claim, made on 28 May, which remains in place, is for a 40 per cent. no strings attached pay increase for firefighters, a 50 per cent. pay increase for control room staff, parity of pay for retained firefighters, and a review of the 1978 pay formula that has governed firefighters' wages for the past 25 years, since their last strike.

At the national joint council meeting on 2 September, the employers finalised their offer of a 4 per cent. increase and requested a joint appeal with the FBU for an independent review of fire service pay and conditions. The union rejected the offer and the review, so the employers made their request direct to Government, and three days later, on 5 September, the Government set up an independent review under Sir George Bain. The union refused to participate in the review or even discuss its terms of reference, and indeed attempted to discredit it—and continues to do so. On 18 October, it announced a programme of 36 days of national strikes due to start on 29 October.

My right hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and the Regions and I held a series of meetings with the Fire Brigades Union on 24 and 25 October. Those discussions resulted in the cancellation of the first two 48-hour strikes, and the first eight-day action was converted into the present 48-hour stoppage. Negotiations between the local government employers and the FBU resumed on 30 October. Because the FBU was not prepared to wait until mid-December for Sir George Bain's report, we agreed to bring forward a position paper on 11 November. Sir George's final report will be available in a few weeks' time. I am extremely grateful to Sir George and his team for their efforts, and I look forward to their final report.

Sir George's position paper was made available to the FBU, the employers and the Government on Monday morning. The paper is comprehensive, practical and forward-looking. It is already deposited in the Library, and I urge all Members of the House to read it carefully. It sets out a vision for a single, more broadly based and modernised service, with multiple roles offering a wider range of services and expertise. It proposes a reward structure in which individuals are valued for the contribution that they make. It encourages a more diverse work force, with a wider range of career paths, responsibilities and skills, and makes it clear that pay and modernisation must go hand in hand and be consistent with the Government's public sector pay policy.

The paper recommends an increase in the pay bill of up to 11 per cent. over two years, subject to necessary and long overdue modernisation. The employers and the FBU met for further discussions on Tuesday morning, and the employers tabled a revised offer. That

[Mr. John Prescott]

offer proposed an immediate increase of 4 per cent., backdated to 7 November, and—subject to the modernisation proposals set out in the Bain report—a further 7 per cent. increase in 12 months' time, in November 2003.

At the moment, a qualified firefighter earns £21,500 a year. Under this offer, a qualified firefighter would earn £23,960 a year, and a leading firefighter would earn £25,656. However, in London, where London weighting allowances apply, a qualified firefighter would earn £28,268 a year, and a leading firefighter would earn £29,964 a year—just a few pounds short of the £30,000 a year demanded by the FBU. This compares very well with nurses, teachers and other public servants.

Sir George has always made it clear that his position paper was not designed to end the strike, but to provide the negotiators with a menu of options for negotiations, which would put in place substantial reform in exchange for substantial pay increases. The Government remain convinced that the Bain review is the key to resolving this dispute, and to providing the basis for a modern fire service that is equipped to deal with modern demands. Unfortunately, when the employers tabled their pay offer on Tuesday morning, the FBU walked out, and at 6 o'clock last night it started a 48-hour strike. Under any reasonable circumstances, the FBU would be sitting down with the employers and discussing the Bain proposals. Instead, 18,000 members of the armed forces, supported by the police, are on the streets today, taking the place of the firefighters. They are using the standby fleet of green goddesses, and sophisticated rescue apparatus and cutting equipment.

I am sure that the whole House will want to express its appreciation for the services of the armed forces—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."]—the police and others who are actively engaged in providing cover during this strike. However, this is an emergency service, not a replacement service. No matter how professional our armed forces are, and no matter how much they train, it is clear that they could not provide the same level of service that we normally expect—particularly where major incidents such as a terrorist attack or a rail crash are concerned.

I have spoken to the general secretary of the FBU again this morning. He is unable to sign up to an agreement setting out how his members would respond in the event of a major incident. He has assured me that his members would consider responding to catastrophic incidents if called to do so. I have no doubt that individual firefighters would want to help; indeed, we saw some of that last night. However, we cannot run a system on the basis that assistance might be available after precious minutes have been lost, and with ambiguity about what kind of incident firefighters would respond to.

So it is with huge regret that I inform the House that we have no agreement with the FBU on the availability of its manpower in respect of major incidents. The FBU has not given an undertaking to abide even by the spirit of the 1979 Trades Union Congress code on the provision of emergency or essential services, which it signed up to in 1978. I believe that this adds to the wrong and irresponsible decisions that the FBU has taken. The Government, and, I am sure, the House and the general public, regret that decision to strike without any further discussion of the Bain proposals.

It is with great sadness that I have to inform the House that overnight there have been four terrible fire-related deaths. I am sure that the thoughts of the whole House are with the families of those who died. Those deaths and the death of Leicester firefighter Bob Miller on 31 October tragically serve to remind us of the daily danger posed by fire, and of the vital work that firefighters do.

On average, more than 11 members of the public die each week in fire-related incidents. I have to report to the House that we have received reports of a large number of hoax calls, which means that our already limited service is stretched even further, putting even more lives at risk. That is wholly unacceptable. It is hard to understand the mentality of people who do that at any time, let alone during a fire strike at a time of heightened sensitivity.

Let there be no doubt, however: the Crown Prosecution Service will take action against anyone caught making hoax calls. Yesterday, it was estimated that in the Strathclyde area as many as 300 hoax calls were made, and I think that the public hope that hoax callers will be dealt with very severely indeed.

Against that background, talking, negotiation and discussion are better than the withdrawal of labour. I continue to believe that Bain is the right way forward. During the past 24 hours, we have heard in the media that the general secretary of the FBU has an alternative vision for modernisation. It would have been better if that vision had been put to the Bain review to form part of its debate. Even now the union has an opportunity to make an input. Sir George's position paper is not a final report. It has been put forward at this stage to help the negotiations.

The employers have made it clear that they stand ready to continue discussions at any time. Would not it be better to negotiate? Would not it be better to sit down again? An 8-day strike can lead only to more deaths, more injuries and more distress.

It is clear that our joint obligation—the Government, the employers and the firefighters—is to provide the highest level of safety. That is our job. We have an obligation to work towards it: all of us—the Government, the employers and the unions. If, once this 48-hour strike is over, we then face an 8-day strike—yet to be confirmed—the Government may have to review many of the issues which until now we have kept off the table.

We have bent over backwards to be fair and reasonable. We have been met with action that is wrong and unjustified, and puts lives at risk. Faced with that, the Government will do what we have to do to protect the public. I say, "Talk, don't walk."

David Davis (Haltemprice and Howden): I thank the Deputy Prime Minister for that statement and for prior sight of it. I am sure that the whole House will want to join him in expressing sorrow at the deaths of four people in fires overnight and at the death of firefighter Bob Miller, and in his outrage at the action of hoax callers who put the lives of other people at risk. I also

associate the Opposition with the Deputy Prime Minister's expression of gratitude for the actions of the armed services in protecting the safety of the public.

There was much in what the Deputy Prime Minister said about the actions of the FBU and its unwillingness to negotiate with which I agree. Today, however, I want to focus on the most important thing: the consequences of the strike for public safety and the steps that are being taken to minimise the risk to life.

The Deputy Prime Minister told us that yesterday and this morning he spoke to the head of the FBU about the willingness of firefighters to assist in the event of a major emergency. I need hardly remind the House that with Britain under heightened threat of terrorist attack, it is imperative that all possible measures are in place to protect the public.

It is clear that individual firefighters do not want to see unnecessary deaths. However, in a major emergency speed is essential, as the right hon. Gentleman pointed out. Minutes matter. Seconds saved can preserve lives, so organisation, command and control are vital to get firefighters to the scene of the emergency rapidly and to co-ordinate them with other emergency services. It is simply not good enough merely to consider assistance in the event of catastrophe—I think that was what the Deputy Prime Minister said. He has already referred to this, but what exact proposals for such command and control did he put to the FBU and precisely what was the response?

Before the strike began, we called on the Deputy Prime Minister to ensure that troops had access to modern fire engines and to the latest firefighting and rescue equipment.

Unfortunately, the Government proved unhelpful. In fact, they came up with a series of spurious reasons why it would not be possible to give troops the best equipment, which would safeguard them and the public against the inevitable dangers of the strike. They said, for example, that it would take three months to train soldiers to use the equipment. That is wrong. The Retained Firefighters Union said that it would take two weeks to train troops to drive a modern fire engine, learn the basics of using specialist cutting equipment and master the use of breathing apparatus.

Will the Deputy Prime Minister now confirm to the House that Ministers were mistaken in their answers? Will he also confirm that there is no practical reason why troops should not be using today's firefighting technology rather than the antiquated kit of 50 years ago?

The Government have also claimed that the only modern fire engines are effectively sidelined because they are locked away behind FBU picket lines. What the right hon. Gentleman has not said is that throughout the country there are many reserve and training fire engines that could be released for use by troops. I can disclose to the House that the House of Commons Library has told me that there are about 400 reserve and training fire appliances at the national training centre and in fire brigades up and down the country. Why does he not bring those into the service of the military and use them to supplement the 800 green goddesses that are now in the front line?

The Opposition want the Government to take all available measures to protect the public. Will the Deputy Prime Minister confirm—I think that he has said this—that that is also the Government's policy? Or is there some ambiguity in the Government's stance, as appears to be the case? The Prime Minister said that allowing troops access to modern firefighting equipment would "inflame the dispute". Now, the firemen are on strike. Fire stations throughout the country are closed and longer strikes are planned until Christmas. Tube stations are closed. In London, there is a risk of wider knock-on disruption from the strike. The Government have given us several reasons for not giving the military the most modern equipment. Can the Deputy Prime Minister reassure the House that the real reason for keeping life-saving equipment under union lock and key is not a misplaced sympathy for the sanctity of the picket line?

The right hon. Gentleman said today that his principal responsibility is to protect the lives of the public. One chief fire officer has already asked the Attorney-General whether the strike action contravenes section 240 of the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992. That law states that strike action that "wilfully or maliciously" endangers human life is illegal. The Attorney-General replied on 25 October that that matter required "constant review" and that he had not formed a concluded view in the context of the ongoing negotiations. He did not consider it in the public interest to act at that time because

"discussions were taking place . . . with the hope of resolving the dispute without industrial action".

Now that industrial action has started and given that there have been fatalities, will the right hon. Gentleman ask the Attorney-General to revisit that issue? If there is the possibility that the strike can be stopped under current legislation, will the Government use their powers to seek an injunction?

Strike action may take other forms. The Health and Safety Executive has said that rail services can still run despite the strikes, and yet Bob Crow of the RMT has threatened to advise his union members not to work. Today, we learn that there has been serious disruption on at least three underground lines in London, causing misery for commuters. What action will the Deputy Prime Minister take if trade unions in vital services disregard the advice of the HSE?

The right hon. Gentleman has given us an account of the run of this negotiation. Now is not the time to rehearse his role in the failed negotiations that led up to the strike. I simply give him notice that we will return to the Government's handling of those negotiations at the earliest opportunity.

The lives of innocent members of the public are at risk today. At the peak of the last national strike, three people died every day. The elderly, children and the disabled—the vulnerable in society—are the most exposed to these risks, so all possible steps must now be taken by the public and by the Government to protect the public.

I recognise that there are also wider issues at stake. A new climate of industrial militancy has returned to haunt the country. Trade union bosses, emboldened by the employment legislation passed by this Government, are set on inflation-busting pay increases, not just in the fire service.

[David Davis]

Labour Ministers boast about modernising Britain. Today, we are seeing the true face of Labour—the strike-torn landscape of the past, not the future.

The Deputy Prime Minister: The statement of the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden (David Davis) may have satisfied his Back Benchers, but it is not the sanctity of picket lines that governs me, but the sanctity of life. For every day—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. There will be no shouting across the Chamber.

The Deputy Prime Minister: We have just heard the terrible facts—four people have died during the dispute. I thought that that might have impressed upon the right hon. Gentleman the challenge that we face in trying to avoid a dispute. Every day that we prevent a strike from happening, lives are saved. I have to make a balanced judgment, in all the difficult negotiations, about the sanctity of life, which, as I say to the trade unions and the right hon. Gentleman alike, has always governed my approach to this matter.

When the 12-day strike was proposed, in the form of two 48-hour strikes and one of eight days, my strategy was to avoid that happening. We achieved that for 10 of the strike days proposed, but failed in respect of the last two. That was not entirely my fault, but I put it to the right hon. Gentleman that avoiding the strike for those 10 days saved unnecessary loss of life. The sanctity of life governs my approach, not the sanctity of the picket line; that suggestion has more to do with the right hon. Gentleman's politics than the national interest.

I welcome the right hon. Gentleman's support at the beginning of his remarks. We are agreed on those points and have had discussions. It is right for him to point out where he disagrees with me and not to criticise me about the delay. However, as I pointed out, the negotiations did not break down until 1 September, and within three days I had set up an inquiry despite the view of the trade union. Therefore, I think that I acted within an appropriate time scale.

Let me deal with some of the essential questions that the right hon. Gentleman raised. He reminded us of the heightened tension that exists because of the possibility of emergencies. I am of course concerned to reach an agreement with the union. The command and control is known as gold command; it applies to emergency situations with floods or on the railways, and the agreement between the police and the firefighters is still in place. We have a communications structure. I asked the Fire Brigades Union to have people with the appropriate skills using the proper vehicles going out if incidents occur. It was not prepared to give me such an agreement. I could accept nothing less than an agreement that its people would be available. The union argued that its pickets are following the 24-hour watch system and that the same people who would be on watch are on pickets and could get straight on to the vehicles. I cannot and will not accept that we have to leave it to a debate at the fire station about who turns out for a particular incident. The House would never have accepted that proposal had I come here with it. That is why I rejected it, with great regret.

I have to take into account what the commanders in the armed forces told my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence about equipment. They made it clear that under these circumstances they would prefer to use the green goddesses because the technique is familiar and the same for all of them. The armed forces do not have the training to use the many different types of fire engine vehicle that are available. *[Interruption.]* I have to take the advice of the commanders, whose obligation is to see that their soldiers work in safe conditions. They do not want their men to work with unfamiliar vehicles. *[Interruption.]* That is the advice given to me. Two weeks' training is not adequate, whatever is said.

I informed the House that it took 12 weeks to be adequately trained on this equipment. There was some controversy about that, so I followed it up to see exactly what it was, and I was shown the sequence of events. That does not mean to say that it is impossible to train a person to do one particular operation, like driving the vehicle, in less time, and that is under way. Before the right hon. Gentleman asked his questions, I had already asked whether vehicles were available at the stations or various centres. The estimate was that there were over 100. There are various estimates. Some vehicles are operating, some are not. *[Interruption.]* I am not disputing what the right hon. Gentleman said about the Library; I am just saying that there are a number of different estimates depending on whether the vehicles are operating, their condition and so on. It is a matter of judgment. There are certainly more than 100. We have made a number of them, and training, available to the emergency command. Days ago they were distributed.

I have had responsibility for the fire service for less than 12 months and I am astounded—*[Interruption.]* Wait for the point. I am astounded that we have not been replacing the green goddesses with modern machines. For 20 years, the Opposition were in power—*[Interruption.]*—and if they had replaced the vehicles at a rate of 200 to 300 a year we would have had the modern fleet that we are talking about. That is the reality. We would have had the equipment and the training. *[Interruption.]* Each can make their point on that. The vehicles should have been replaced. I have no doubt about that. We will accept our responsibility for the few years when we did not replace them. Will the Opposition accept their responsibility for the 20 years when they were in charge? No, of course they will not.

I was asked what legal actions could be taken in these matters. Yes, the Attorney-General was asked to review this by one of the fire brigade authorities and he was reviewing whether an action could be taken. When he was first asked we were in negotiations with the unions, which decided to call off the strike. So on the first occasion the Attorney-General was actively involved. I know that he has been having discussions or an exchange of correspondence with the Opposition about this particular point. An action could be taken now. He has been considering how it would apply. Even an application under this injunction in these circumstances would probably be being processed by the court when the strike was over.

I want to bring home this point, which is a consideration of mine and hon. Members can reject it if they like. If the strike is 48 hours, I want those fire engines working from minute one after the strike. If the

legal actions that the right hon. Gentleman is talking about are taken under these circumstances, or had been taken under the previous circumstances, we would face the difficult question of whether such vehicles were available or whether we had inflamed the strike. These are difficult decisions. The right hon. Gentleman can be indifferent to them. Do not forget, whatever the solution is, lives are saved if firemen can be prevented from going out on a long strike. That may be a matter of complete indifference to him, but it is not to me. I am constantly making that judgment.

The right hon. Gentleman raised some points about the RMT. What is happening is quite unacceptable when the Health and Safety Executive has made it clear that it is safe. The accusation is that it is possible that 20-odd stations may create certain difficulties. The transport authority has taken action to close them. What is unacceptable are the actions taken on the Piccadilly line and others, causing disruption when the Health and Safety Executive, an independent body set up by this House, has said that operation is safe. That cannot be condoned. It is unacceptable.

In conclusion, I have to make a balanced judgment about the 48-hour strike. All the options to which the right hon. Gentleman referred and which have been discussed between us are under continual review. What may be acceptable for a 48-hour stoppage, in the balance of judgment, may not remain acceptable in the balance of judgment for an eight-day dispute. It is all under review. Whatever I have to do, I will do it. Be clear about that.

Mr. Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton): I thank the Deputy Prime Minister for that statement, and for providing a copy in advance. I join him in sending condolences to all the families who have lost loved ones in the tragedies of the past 18 hours. I also pay tribute to firefighter Robert Miller, and pass on my party's sympathies to his family and close colleagues as they come to terms with their loss.

The Deputy Prime Minister said that the strike was wrong, unnecessary and unreasonable, and that the FBU should end its action and return to the negotiating table. We on the Liberal Democrat Benches fully agree with that. Does he agree that the dispute is about modernisation as much as pay? Does he share my deep regret not only that the FBU leadership has blocked reform in recent months, but that it has been a major obstacle to modernisation for more than two decades? Will he reassure the House that the Government will urge the employers to stand firm in negotiations, and to insist that any pay settlement is inextricably linked to radical reform of working practices, as Bain set out?

Will the Deputy Prime Minister also reassure the House that, if the FBU were to call off the strike and agree to negotiate about real modernisation, the Government would find ways to fund conditional increases, over and above the offer proposed by Bain? Does he agree that, although new working practices can improve the quality and standard of protection for the public, the financial savings will be limited, especially in the first year or two? Would not it be sensible, therefore, for the Government to front-end funding to win a pay deal so that we can secure back-end savings and long-term reform?

Does the Deputy Prime Minister share my view that it is unacceptable for London tube drivers to take unofficial secondary action, and will he condemn that? Will he confirm to the House once again, especially for the benefit of those on the Conservative Front Bench, that our armed forces are not seizing control of fire appliances at fire stations because military commanders have asked specifically not to have to do that? Is it not disgraceful that party political points are being made over this issue? However, will he keep the matter under review with those senior military personnel? If circumstances change, does he recognise that their judgment may need to be reviewed?

Finally, will the Deputy Prime Minister tell the House what action he intends to take to support the police in tracking down hoax callers? Given the fabulous efforts of our armed forces and police, and the risk to public safety, is not it right that anyone caught making hoax calls should be punished severely?

The Deputy Prime Minister: That is how a serious Opposition make a contribution to the debate. Anyone who reads *Hansard* will be able to contrast the two approaches that have been adopted. People will make their judgment accordingly. That is why the Conservatives are going down and the Liberals are going up.

I thank the hon. Gentleman very much for his supportive remarks, and for his call to the FBU to return to negotiations. The general secretary of the FBU has said that the union has proposals for modernisation and that they have been put forward, but they were not put forward to Bain. If those proposals are available, and if the general secretary agrees with some of the Bain report's implications, why does he not put them on the table? Even if he decides to go for an eight-day strike—and we must be clear that no one wants that—there would still be seven or eight days in which he could sit down and talk, talk, talk. He should put as much energy into talking as into the walking that is happening at the moment. He should come down to London from Edinburgh and begin meetings with employers to talk about the FBU's modernisation proposals. I do not see anything wrong with that, and it is what the public would expect. We could then see the true nature of the FBU's proposals, and compare them with Bain's. I hope that that is what the general secretary will do, and indeed I appeal yet again to the union to take that approach.

I certainly make it clear that modernisation will have to happen. The general secretary of the FBU has told me that the union has its own modernisation proposals, and that the union is not scared of modernising. To that, I say, "Fine, then pay can be related to modernisation." We have to negotiate that.

As to whether extra money should be made available, I set up the Bain inquiry because there were so many disputes about what could be saved through modernisation, and about what efficiency meant. The Bain report makes it clear that all its recommendations have been agreed within the industry, but that they have failed to be implemented. That is a serious matter, but Bain makes it clear that it is possible to negotiate on these matters and that pay rises can be paid for through modernisation. There is an issue about the forward and back funding of the rises. I understand the point that the

[Mr. Edward Davey]

hon. Gentleman makes, but the firefighters should go in and negotiate. If they do not agree with Bain, they can walk out again, if they want, but they should at least talk to him about their proposals and his proposals. That is why we always have inquiries in this country—to arrive at an objective judgment. Governments are bound to take account of that objective judgment. That is our position.

As for whether 11 per cent. is adequate, I have to say to the hon. Gentleman that it is a very generous offer because the firefighters are a special case. We have connected it with the modernisation proposals. I ask him to take into account the consequential effect on public pay. It is all right to say, "What is a fireman worth?" but why should a nurse not say, "What is a nurse worth?"? If nurses walked out of the wards, there would be more deaths and accidents than when firefighters walk out. There is a special obligation. That is why we treat certain groups in a special way. I cannot ignore the consequences for public pay by simply offering 11 per cent. We have already seen that some of the firefighters at airports are now saying, "If they can get a rise, why shouldn't we have it?" The effects are complicated, and the Government have to justify what they are doing. The issue is not solely about firefighters, although the offer is generous, but about public pay.

What the hon. Gentleman said about the military is right. We have to take the military into account. The hoax calls are deplorable; I hope that we catch more hoax callers. However, hoax calls do not happen only during disputes. Many firefighters face the problem all the time. They have to rush out with machinery and risk their lives because someone has made a hoax call. Something like 8 per cent. of all call-outs are hoaxes. That is unacceptable.

I have made clear my view about the underground.

Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): I thank my right hon. Friend for making it so clear that his approach to this regrettable dispute is firmly based on the sanctity of life, in marked contrast to that of Conservative Members who, despite their newly found concerns for the frail, the vulnerable and the elderly, were perfectly prepared to let them die from hypothermia, winter after winter when they were in government. What discussions is my right hon. Friend having with London Underground to ensure that there is a better than adequate contingency plan to provide services to Londoners should the regrettable secondary action continue among some drivers?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I thank my hon. Friend for her remarks; I agree with them. Discussions have taken place between London Underground and my right hon. Friends the Minister for Local Government and the Regions and the Minister for Transport. I have had some exchanges with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport and across the Government about the matter. The action by London Underground staff is unacceptable and unjustified.

Mr. Henry Bellingham (North-West Norfolk): Will the Deputy Prime Minister join me in paying tribute to the excellent work done by the retained firemen in my constituency in Terrington St. Clement, Massingham and Sandringham? They do a superb job. Does he agree that there is an argument that they should have access to some of the modern equipment in the main stations in the vicinity? Will he consider that point?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I do not know the exact circumstances to which the hon. Gentleman refers. The retained firefighters are mainly in rural areas such as he represents. I give credit to the people who assist the fire brigades. They have agreed not to go out on strike, and they want to meet the need for fire services. Something like 60 per cent. of areas have some retained firefighters. The retained firefighters are divided; some are members of the FBU, some are not. They have made a conscious decision through their organisation to keep on talking rather than go on strike. That is certainly helping in the area that I represent, and I offer my thanks to them.

Lynne Jones (Birmingham, Selly Oak): The people who should be condemned today are the hoax callers, not the firefighters, who feel that they have no alternative but to take this strike action. I spoke to firefighters in my constituency and urged them to wait for Bain. I was surprised at the support that I received, but now they feel deeply angered because Bain has dismissed without explanation their fundamental case that there should be recognition of the increased sophistication and complexity of their role since their pay formula was agreed 25 years ago. Does my right hon. Friend understand that there can be no basis for negotiations unless that omission is recognised? I agree that there is need for reform, but we must understand that the impressive nature of our fire service is due to the interdependence and camaraderie of our firefighters. That must be defended at all costs.

The Deputy Prime Minister: I do not disagree with what my hon. Friend says about solidarity among firefighters at the fire station. I think we are all aware of it. I am a great admirer of firefighters: I think they are exceptional, and last night, notwithstanding the dispute, some wanted to go out and help. However, I am facing a dispute between employers and employees, and little information is available to allow a judgment on the competing claims.

I set up the Bain inquiry. It would have been helpful if the fire workers had given the inquiry their evidence on all these complex issues. Instead, they attacked the inquiry and members of it, and said that they would not accept what it said. It was not merely a case of their not presenting the complex arguments. Then, when the inquiry's report was delivered, they refused to discuss it. I cannot accept that there is no forum for them to make their case. Other fire workers said, "Let us wait for the Bain report," but it was not discussed because their colleagues were not prepared to accept it.

These fire workers wanted a 40 per cent. increase in their basic pay. As I have made clear time and again, that is not possible. The fire workers have not deviated: they have said that it must be 40 per cent. or nothing. When I said that in the event of a dispute lives would be endangered, they said, "It is not our responsibility. The Government and local authorities are responsible for safety." That is a very dangerous argument, and the fire workers should think carefully before going too far along that road.

The fire workers have been given one opportunity, and we are now giving them another. If they have modernisation proposals that they could not give to Bain and did not want to discuss, let them put those proposals to the employers, and start talking. We know that if they talk rather than walk, more people will live.

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate): The Deputy Prime Minister's remarks about the sanctity of life will be received with some interest by members of my old regiment, the Light Dragoons, who are now deployed in Cleveland. They have been training for months in preparation for the strike, and we now discover that between 100 and 400 vehicles are available for them and the rest of the Army to train on—at a time when they might have done better to train in preparation for enforcing the United Nations Security Council resolution.

It is contemptible of the Deputy Prime Minister, and particularly contemptible of the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey), to hide behind loyal comments from senior members of the armed services, and for the Deputy Prime Minister to use them as justification for not being prepared to cross a picket line and make those vehicles available to members of the armed forces. It is disgraceful that he should argue that the Army should have spent millions of pounds of taxpayers' money to produce 800 new fire engines on an MOD estate just because he and his Ministers were not prepared to cross a picket line. He should not seek to hide behind the armed forces in this outrageous way.

The Deputy Prime Minister: I would have expected the hon. Gentleman, given his military experience, to understand what I said. I said that I would take the advice of the military commanders, who say that our responsibility is maximum safety for the soldiers in this difficult situation. They have concluded that it is better for training to take place on the green goddesses than for extra fire engines to be used.

Incidentally, 400 vehicles are not available. Some are being taken apart—*[Interruption.]* As I have said, we have agreed with the military that they will train some of their people to use these vehicles. Some have already been distributed, while others are available to those in emergency command to distribute as they see fit. We are reviewing the situation constantly and want to improve on it, but when a military commander tells me that he is concerned about his members I think very carefully before ignoring such advice. I suspect that when the hon. Gentleman was in the Army he would not have ignored it either.

Ms Joan Walley (Stoke-on-Trent, North): I have enormous respect for the specialist work that firefighters do throughout the country.

It is clear that at some stage a negotiated settlement will be necessary, and I thank my right hon. Friend for the work he has done so far. I also thank John Monks of the TUC for his attempts to bring people together in the dispute. Now that we face such a serious situation, nothing is more important than getting people back around the table. Let us look at what can be achieved. Let us concentrate on where Bain gives grounds for agreement, rather than on the disagreements. I understand that that there is agreement in respect of community fire safety, the fire cover review and personal development plans. Will my right hon. Friend take account of this appeal to the FBU and to him to bring all the parties together to prevent further strike action?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I thank my hon. Friend for her remarks. The essential point is that the issue will be determined by continuing negotiations. I think that we are all aware of that. I have always felt that we have tried to keep open all avenues for negotiation, as that is the way forward. Indeed, getting a cancellation of 10 of the first 12 strike days was a contribution in that regard that a lot of people, including the FBU, worked to achieve. I am grateful to them. She was right to point out that the FBU agrees with a number of aspects of modernisation, even though it has not put that to the Bain committee. I can only reiterate what I have said: immediately after the dispute—I agree that it is unlikely to call it off now—the union should go straight into negotiation. I shall make it clear to the employers and the general secretary of the FBU, as I have been doing from time to time, that the way in which people reach a settlement is by talking.

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): May I thank both my right hon. Friend the Member for Haltemprice and Howden (David Davis) and the Deputy Prime Minister for the sentiments that they expressed about Mr. Bob Miller, my constituent who died a little while ago in a fire in the city of Leicester? Irrespective of the rights and wrongs of the strike, which I happen to think is misguided, I have in my constituency another family without a father and a wife without a husband. We should all bear that in mind when we get overexcited about some of the issues under discussion.

I should like to make a practical suggestion to the Deputy Prime Minister. Will he discuss with the Lord Chancellor whether it would be appropriate for the Lord Chief Justice to issue sentencing guidance on cases involving hoax callers so that those who are caught making a hoax call, and those who contemplate making one, realise that they will be given an exemplary custodial sentence, irrespective of whether the defendant is under or over 18?

The Deputy Prime Minister: The whole House will recall the loss suffered by the family of Bob Miller and tributes have been paid by the Leader of the Opposition and the Prime Minister. That loss emphasises the dangers of the situation and reaffirms my dedication to avoiding any dispute if that is at all possible. That is a matter of balanced judgment and I have given mine to the House today.

With regard to the Lord Chancellor and discussions about the matters to which the hon. and learned Gentleman referred, there is no doubt that we want to ensure that exemplary sentencing takes place. We have already had some discussions with the Attorney-General. The Lord Chancellor is actively aware of that, and those at this morning's Cobra meeting talked about re-emphasising that aspect and using exemplary

[Mr. Edward Garnier]

sentencing against people caught in that situation. I shall take on board what the hon. and learned Gentleman said.

Mr. Michael Weir (Angus): Does the Deputy Prime Minister accept that the problem with the Bain inquiry appears to be that the union has had no confidence in it from an early stage, due to statements allegedly made by members of the commission? Does he accept that, if the FBU has proposals for modernisation, it makes sense even at this late stage to see whether a commission can be re-formed in which all parties have some confidence? That may be the way forward in this dispute.

The Deputy Prime Minister: I have to refute the suggestion that members of the Bain committee made comments that were anti in any way. In fact, the opposite was the case. It was recorded in the press that members of the FBU, including the general secretary, approached one of the independent members appointed by the TUC and made some remarks, had some exchanges and then publicly launched an attack on the committee. That was a deplorable action and I have made that clear to the FBU.

I do not think that there are any other examples of comments made by the committee members against any of the parties to the dispute. Indeed, they have done a wonderful job in a very short time to give us advice on how we can make a judgment about modernisation in relation to efficiency and pay. I congratulate them on that work. The employers accept it and the Government accept the framework for negotiations and discussions set out by Bain, but the suggestion that another body should be set up because one party opposes it—it has done so bitterly throughout the process—would be a vote of no confidence in George Bain, which he does not warrant. We have the menu and he has produced what he thinks we can consider in relation to improving efficiency. If the FBU has a suggestion that it could not give to the committee, it should come and give it to the employers and start discussing it.

Mr. Kevin Hughes (Doncaster, North): I am sorry that the FBU has decided to go ahead with the strike. I believe that there will be a negotiated settlement and that the only way in which to negotiate it is to get round the table. Not many days ago, Andy Gilchrist told my right hon. Friend to put down the megaphone and pick up the telephone. It is now Andy Gilchrist's turn to put down the megaphone and get back round the table.

It is disgraceful that FBU leaders will not reach an agreement with my right hon. Friend about cover for major incidents. I cannot believe that ordinary firefighters in my constituency and throughout the country will sit back and do nothing in a major emergency. If the FBU leaders will not sit round the table and reach an agreement, will my right hon. Friend make a direct appeal to ordinary firefighters?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I thank my hon. Friend for his supportive remarks. I read in the papers that Andy Gilchrist had suggested that I picked up the telephone and put down the megaphone. That sounds a little strange from Mr. Gilchrist, but I shall not go into that. The purpose of one call was to discuss his suggestion that there was not enough safety cover to deal with serious incidents. He was worried that all his members would come running and that there would be no control system. We met the FBU on 21 October and said that we would set up the control organisation. We have done that, and we now have to ask, "Where are your members?"

As we now know, Andy Gilchrist cannot give an undertaking that members will be available. He confirmed that in a conversation this morning. I stress that the organisation is there. As Andy Gilchrist continues to remind us, his members are humanitarians. If, therefore, they come to help—and I am sure that they will—the organisation is in place. That is not satisfactory for planning emergency provisions, but we have to operate within those limited circumstances. I have appealed to other fire workers, and I have clearly stated, "Talk, not walk". I hope that they will hold more debates about the matter after the 48-hour strike and before they commit themselves to a dispute of a further eight days.

Patrick Mercer (Newark): I listened with interest to the Deputy Prime Minister. The armed forces are working not only with green goddesses but with advanced equipment such as breathing apparatus and rescue tenders. However, does he agree that the armed forces knew at the end of July that this situation would occur? Is it not therefore a disgrace that advance training did not start then so as better to preserve the sanctity of life?

The Deputy Prime Minister: The military people advised me that training did begin then. It was a tremendous operation to give 18,000 people some sort of training. We take advice and tell the armed forces when a dispute is likely to occur. We acted on the assumption that there would be a dispute, while doing everything possible to try to avoid it. The armed forces were aware of the proposed dispute and they undertook the training.

I am glad that the hon. Gentleman commented on what I perhaps failed to mention. People refer to 850 green goddesses, but there are as many as 400 other specialist vehicles with specialist teams. They act as back-ups to the green goddesses and have special cutting equipment and breathing apparatus.

I stress that we took the advice of the military on training, and I believe that we were right to do that.

David Winnick (Walsall, North): I recognise that a 40 per cent. claim was never realistic, but does my right hon. Friend accept that the firefighters have very strong feelings and that they have not taken action lightly? They believe that they are underpaid and undervalued, and we should bear that in mind. Leaving aside the Tories' anti-union rhetoric, which one would expect and which almost resembles a *Daily Mail* editorial, to what extent does my right hon. Friend believe that there is a possibility of reaching a realistic pay settlement that is higher than that offered by the employers but far short of 40 per cent.?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I thank my hon. Friend for his comments. I do not doubt the firefighters'

strength of feeling. It can be seen on television and when one meets them. They feel wronged, but if they feel that they have been paid so poorly why did they agree to the pay formula in 1978? The general secretary said about that formula:

"Our wages remain ahead of other essential public sector workers precisely because we have maintained the formula."

If it was so bad over all those years, why did the general secretary say that in July 2000? I am not saying that he may not have a case, but it cannot be said that they have been subjected to decades of poor pay, as he seems to suggest, otherwise they would have sought to change it.

We cannot always assume that the firefighters' income is their basic pay, and that may be an influencing factor. The shift system means that they have days off when they can pursue further employment. I do not condemn that in any way, but when considering a fire worker's pay I might have to ask about his total pay. I do not have the necessary evidence, so I asked George Bain to look at the circumstances. He compared firefighters' wages with those of other public sector workers, and he took into account the fact that they have the best pension in the public sector, with retirement at the age of 53 or 55 on two thirds of pay—it sounds like MPs' pensions, but I leave that aside—and payments for medical prescriptions and eye and dental treatment. Presumably, those are all considerations when assessing the rewards of the job. If they did not have an overtime ban they could have been using some of that payment to supplement their pay. They chose not to do so, but they cannot now blame us and say that the formula that they agreed and the payments that they have been receiving have been so wrong for so long.

I accepted that the firefighters had an argument, so I set up the Bain inquiry, which will be reporting in mid-December and will give us more information. However, the one thing that I have found in this strike is the lack of any adequate information about pay and conditions and the efficiency and effectiveness of working practices. That is what George Bain will provide, and it is right that he should so. It is called modernisation. If the firefighters wish, they can get a lot more money for that, but they must negotiate.

Mr. Michael Fallon (Sevenoaks): Will the Deputy Prime Minister give the House an assurance that if military commanders request the use of specialist equipment that happens to be stored inside fire stations, the Government will not stand in their way?

The Deputy Prime Minister: It is important that military personnel should have access to specialist equipment. They are doing the job and facing the risk. That is why we have an extra 400 vehicles providing specialist equipment. In addition, some of the equipment on the red fire engines will be made available if they so wish. For example, red fire engines have ladders that extend to two floors, whereas those on the green goddesses extend to only one. Those facilities are available, and they can make a judgment about them. We will try to give them the best possible equipment, but the constraint is not so much the vehicles as manning them with specialists, as we have been discussing.

Mr. Barry Gardiner (Brent, North): My right hon. Friend will know that there have been rumours that the Government intervened earlier in the dispute to stop a 16 per cent. increase. Will he take this opportunity categorically to inform the House whether that happened? Does he agree that last year, after 11 September, the firefighters were universally regarded by the public, certainly in Britain, as among the greatest workers, and that they still are regarded as great heroes by the public—but that they think they are lions led by donkeys?

The Deputy Prime Minister: No, I certainly would not agree with the last comment. I believe in negotiation, and perhaps that is better done by lions. I have no doubt that people regard fire workers with great awe and admiration. Sometimes I read that train drivers or building industry workers are at more risk, and it is true that more of them have died, but the difference between them and the fire workers is that fire workers walk into danger and do not run away from it. That is the special nature of their contribution and that is why we admire them. They act for the community—I need push that point no further. The public have a growing concern about the strike, but none should doubt our admiration for the fire workers.

With regard to what has been said about the 16 per cent. offer, I should make it absolutely clear that that is a load of rubbish put out by the FBU. It knows it and I have talked to it and we have agreed on that, but there is an element of propaganda in these situations.

Let me put it on the record that I did ask the local authorities about this matter when I first read of it. Indeed, on 8 August, when I first met the FBU general secretary, he asked me whether I had intervened to stop an agreement on 16 per cent. I told him, "Absolutely not." Of course, I then went to the employers and said, "Did you make any offer in any way of 16 per cent. to the fire people?" They said, "No, but in the earlier discussions we had looked at getting 16 per cent." That is all about hey diddle diddle in the middle—£25,000 instead of £30,000—so we can see how they probably arrived at that figure in the current state of negotiations in Britain. They said that it would cost so much; the full claim would cost £450 million. Even if that were halved, there is not the money for such funding in the local authority settlement.

I made it clear to Andy Gilchrist on 8 August, "If you're asking for 40 per cent., if you're asking me if the Government are involved, and if you continue asking for 40 per cent., by definition the Government are involved because local authorities have to ask me whether they can have the extra money." For that reason, we have made it clear that we will not provide that extra money, which offends against the policy and agreements in the local authority settlements. However, there are no strings to negotiating within that framework, which has produced the figure of 4 per cent.

The fire people were never, ever offered 16 per cent. Some employers suggested round the side, "Look, we were going to try to give you 16 per cent., but the Government stopped us." There must be a definition: there was no intervention whatever from me, but it may be that people felt it was easier to say that the

[Mr. Barry Gardiner]

Government would not provide the money. It was never offered, though. I never intervened and I was never actively involved in such an offer.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): May I remind the right hon. Gentleman of the effect of section 240 of the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992? It says:

"A person ... who wilfully ... breaks a contract of service ... knowing or"

believing

"that the probable consequences ... will be ... to endanger ... life or cause serious bodily injury or ... expose valuable property ... to serious injury"

is committing a criminal offence. May I also remind him that the Attorney-General has a right to seek an injunction? May I ask what the right hon. Gentleman is doing to enforce the criminal law, and thus give substance to his assurance that he is trying to save lives?

The Deputy Prime Minister: Lawyers always seem to talk in a very pompous way when they get on to the law—and the right hon. and learned Gentleman is well known for it in the House. I will take the advice of the Attorney-General on these matters, as he has been looking at them. The right hon. and learned Gentleman is right to point out exactly what the law is—often, lawyers parrot the law and assume that it will solve everything if I go outside and say, "The law says this and everything is okay." Parliament is here because we know the difficulties; people do not necessarily accept those propositions. I prefer the negotiated way.

The right hon. and learned Gentleman talks about the sanctity of life. If I avoid disputes instead of— *[Interruption.]* Just keep your ears open and listen instead of shouting out.

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): How about an answer?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I am giving the answer. The Opposition are entitled to ask the question and I am entitled to give the answer.

I have made the choice to try, through negotiations, to prevent disputes rather than inflame them, but I do not ignore the fact that the Law Officers—in this case the Attorney-General, as I said in my statement—are considering all those options. He was first asked to do so when I was trying to get the union to cancel the strike. That is a classic case. Which would the right hon. and learned Gentleman have preferred—using the law or cancelling the strike?

Mr. Swayne: So what is the answer to the question?

Mr. Speaker: Order. Mr. Swayne, you must be quiet. You must restrain yourself.

Mr. Kevin Barron (Rother Valley): As the vast majority of industrial disputes are settled around a table by negotiation, sometimes after many painful weeks for both sides, will my right hon. Friend confirm that he will keep open the option for the FBU to participate in the Bain inquiry, if it chooses to do so, to represent the wishes of rank and file firefighters?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I understand my right hon. Friend's point, particularly considering his background and experience in these matters, which involve the conflict of the law, industrial rights and all the rights that we are talking about. I would like to avoid such conflict and I will do everything I can to do so, but I will not ask the FBU to do that.

I made it clear that the FBU should give evidence to Bain, but the union has demonised the inquiry, as it does not think that Bain can do the job. I do not ask the FBU to join the inquiry now—take the proposals to the employers and negotiate with them. They are the ones who implement firefighters' conditions and they are the ones who are responsible for finding agreement.

The FBU should negotiate with the employers. I appeal yet again to the union and say, "If you don't want to go through Bain, show us your alternative by going to the employers with your modernisation proposals." Andy Gilchrist has been saying such things constantly on television. Start talking; less of the walking.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): Is the right hon. Gentleman aware of the alarming gaps in fire cover in some parts of the country? I do not expect him to know the details of the geography of my constituency, but the town of Frome and the villages around it are being served by a green goddess based in Yeovil, which is an hour's drive away, if a vehicle is available. I am told that nearer green goddesses stationed in Bath or Trowbridge cannot attend fires in Somerset because they cannot cross brigade borders. Is that correct? If so, can he do something about it?

The Deputy Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman raises the inadequacies of a system that does not provide a full fire service, and the whole House is aware of that. We constantly review that system as incidents develop and we will keep in mind the point that he has made.

The hon. Gentleman makes a point about retained fire workers—

Mr. Heath: Green goddesses.

The Deputy Prime Minister: I am sorry. On green goddesses crossing lines, we will take the hon. Gentleman's point into account. I shall write to the hon. Gentleman to see exactly what the position is. I take the point that he makes and shall see whether I can get him better information.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Speaker: Order. There are still hon. Members wishing to question the Deputy Prime Minister. I am mindful of the Modernisation Committee's recommendation that one hour should be allocated for a statement, but in view of the serious nature of this statement I intend to allow questions to continue. However, I need the co-operation of hon. Members. They must put one question to the Deputy Prime

Minister. They must not enter into a speech. Even so, hon. Members may be disappointed as I may not be able to call everyone.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): At the close of my right hon. Friend's statement, he said to the Fire Brigades Union, "Talk, don't walk". In his statement on 22 October, he said that negotiations should take place with the employers. Today, he has said that they should take place with Bain and the employers. However, the most successful negotiations were those on 24 and 25 October, in which he was involved. Is that option still open?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I take your point, Mr. Speaker, about modernisation. I cannot be critical; I voted against a number of the proposals.

On negotiations, I am saying that the union can go to the employer. I was not actively involved in the negotiations in the sense of deciding what should be offered or rejected. I simply pressed both parties to go back to the table. The one contribution I made was because of the difficulty of making an assessment about efficiencies. I needed an independent body because both sides were giving conflicting evidence. Hence I set up the Bain inquiry. It was not due to report until December, but I got it to agree to be ready by 11 November. I was not involved in those negotiations in any way.

Negotiations did take place. There was an improvement in some of the conditions that were offered, but the employers said when the report came out that they would have to recognise the Bain proposals. That is their right. They just said, "Let us negotiate on that." Now, if they have the fire brigades' modernisation proposals, perhaps they can get back to the table and do as I said. There should be talk, not walk.

Mr. Simon Burns (West Chelmsford): As firefighting is both an emergency and an essential service, once this dispute is over will the Deputy Prime Minister consider, either through legislation or by voluntary but binding agreements, putting firefighters on a par with the police, the armed forces and other key workers and seek an end to strikes in that sector?

The Deputy Prime Minister: It is true that, particularly in those sectors, people do not want strikes. They are different. They threaten life; there is no doubt about it. That is why those sectors arrive at those conditions. However, the agreement on pay has meant that we have had 25 years without a strike and that should not be ignored.

Mr. Burns: Local strikes.

The Deputy Prime Minister: Yes, there have been a few local ones, but in the main if one can use negotiation instead of the law, that is useful. However, as I have said, we will review all—I mean all—circumstances arising out of the dispute.

Mr. Stephen McCabe (Birmingham, Hall Green): I agree with my right hon. Friend and share his hope that there will be a sane and negotiated settlement. A great many of my constituents hear all these pay claims and would love to have a contract that allowed them to be paid for the hours that they sleep while they are at work. Should we not address that?

The Deputy Prime Minister: When many of our constituents read about what is being offered, they find it difficult to understand why it is being rejected. Indeed, most of the television representation is from London fire stations and London firefighters, who now get £28,000, £29,000 and almost £30,000, so it is difficult to understand why they are rejecting the offer. All we can do is to make the case that we think that it is a fair offer, that they should seriously consider negotiating, and that they should take into account the pay increases that we are agreeing to give to the nurses, which has to be a comparison. After all, they treat the firefighters when they are injured in their dangerous occupation.

Mr. Michael Jack (Fylde): Has the Deputy Prime Minister assessed whether firefighters are vulnerable to action under human rights legislation in the event of loss of life or damage to property? In the event of an eight-day strike, is he considering calling a state of emergency?

The Deputy Prime Minister: All these matters of liability, involving not only people who may have suffered damage, but those who are playing a part in the dispute, are constantly under review. When it comes to human rights in one form or another, there must be a balance. It is claimed that the right to go on strike is also a human right that should not be denied. I am doing my best to find the proper balance.

Mr. Clive Soley (Ealing, Acton and Shepherd's Bush): Does my right hon. Friend accept that, for the first time in more than 20 years, public sector pay is increasing faster than private sector pay? In those circumstances, if all public sector workers were to address their problems in the same way as the FBU has done, the only losers would be the public sector, although the Conservatives would continue to smile about it.

The Deputy Prime Minister: I am sure that that is a serious threat. On public sector pay, we can claim that there are now 200,000 more workers in the public sector and that their pay is increasing faster than those in the private sector, although to be fair about that, it may have occurred over a longer period, rather than in the past year or two. However, I do not think that any previous Government could have claimed that since they came to power, public sector workers had had wage increases far in excess of inflation in order to help them catch up with the private sector. I am bound to say that that does not seem to register in any of the pay claims. There comes a time when the Government have to do what they consider fair, and that is where we are at the moment.

Mr. John Baron (Billericay): Given that the Army will be overstretched, early detection of fire will be even more critical. Will the Deputy Prime Minister discuss with Government Departments the possibility of committing extra resources to social services in order to

[Mr. John Baron]

ensure that smoke detectors are installed in the homes of the elderly and vulnerable, particularly those who live alone?

The Deputy Prime Minister: The Government have been following that policy for some time, but as the hon. Gentleman has raised the matter, I shall revisit it and see whether we can do more. Tragically, one of the deaths recorded last night was that of someone in those circumstances who informed us of the threat to his life by telling the authorities that there was a fire. We have to recognise that the fact that the vehicle took quite a long time to get there undoubtedly contributed to his death. That is all the more reason why the firefighters should be talking not walking.

John Robertson (Glasgow, Anniesland): Can I tell my right hon. Friend how disgusted and ashamed I am as a Strathclyde Member of yesterday's 300 hoax callers? As people are saying in Glasgow, they are nothing but scum and should be treated as such. Does my right hon. Friend agree that Army firefighters crossing picket lines will only intensify the situation and we will fall into the trap of some trade unionists and Conservatives who wish to make the dispute worse?

The Deputy Prime Minister: What my hon. Friend said about the 300 hoaxers expresses how we all feel, although I could not possibly say that. To be fair, only Strathclyde has made a judgment about that; I am sure that every part of the country is afflicted by hoax callers. We have made it clear that we condemn them and we need to stiffen up the approach of the courts in dealing with these people when they are caught.

Mr. George Osborne (Tatton): Not a single green goddess is stationed in my constituency today, putting the lives of my constituents at risk. The Deputy Prime Minister said today that if the Government faced an eight-day strike, they might have to review many of the issues that, until now, have been kept off the table. Does that include giving the Army access to the modern firefighting equipment that lies idle in my constituency today?

The Deputy Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman could not have been listening to what I said. I have made it clear that the constraint on the use of the vehicles is not simply a question of access. It is the judgment of the armed services that we could not train enough people to man all 3,000 vehicles, even if we could acquire them. We have tried to get a proper balance, and the hon. Gentleman should bear in mind that any system of fire cover does not prevent lives from being lost. Some 10 or 11 lives are lost on average a week. In those circumstances, we must do our best to try to avoid any further deaths. However, the Army officers and command structure have given us their advice and we are doing our best to provide them with the best equipment. They agree with the balance that we have at the moment.

Mr. Mark Todd (South Derbyshire): I spent two hours with a dozen south Derbyshire firefighters on Monday evening. Is there not one message that we can give to them as trade unionists—that no sensible trade union enters a dispute without a clear exit strategy, something that appears to be sadly lacking in the FBU at the moment?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I must admit that, as an ex-trade union official and negotiator, I know that one tries to keep a back door open. I thought perhaps that the FBU had one, but as we went on, we heard that the claim was 40 per cent. or nothing, do or die. It is clear that we cannot and will not pay that and that the money will not be available. It is a matter of judgment as to what can be arrived at in negotiations. The union has been made an offer, but it has kept on demanding 40 per cent. I hear from the television that the union might come down further. It may be referring to the preferred option that I supposedly intervened to give, but I never intervened. If the union is in the mood to negotiate on modernisation—the union has said that in the last 24 hours, and we have not heard that before—it must get back to the table with the employers and discuss it. Don't walk, talk; that is still our position.

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): The last time the Deputy Prime Minister made a statement on the fire dispute, he said clearly that the reason why military personnel could not have access to fire appliances was an operational one because they were needed for day-to-day use. Today, he has explained on several occasions that the Government are not seeking that access on military advice. When was that military advice given—months ago, when the dispute was flagged up, or since he last made a statement to the House?

The Deputy Prime Minister: We made clear the position on appliances months ago and also on what advice the armed services gave us. There are two connected points in the hon. Lady's question. The first is the availability of the vehicles and whether there is any further constraint, and the other is whether we barge in and take over the vehicles. That seems to lie behind some of the questions—a sense of, "Let's go in and grab them." However, even if we did, we would not have the people to man them. We have to make a balanced judgment. If the union had called off its strike, our people would not have been threatened. I agree that there is now a dispute and I am asking the union to come back to the table. At the end of the day, our policy has saved lives. The sanctity of life is the issue, not the sanctity of the picket line, although that seems to be behind most of the inquiries.

Gareth Thomas (Clwyd, West): I agree entirely that the FBU's claim is unreasonable, and that view is now shared by the majority of my constituents, although there is widespread admiration for the work of firefighters. Should not the FBU return to the negotiating table at the earliest opportunity, in the interests of public safety and common sense, to resolve this matter with more modest and realistic expectations of what it can achieve?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I agree, and, I hope that that has been the core of my message today—that the union should get back to the negotiating table. That is

what has pushed me through the last few weeks. I see hopeful signs during the dispute, as some have talked about a claim of less than 40 per cent. and about fire brigade modernisation. That provides us with an opportunity to go back to the table. The employers and the union should each find out exactly what the other is saying. They should not talk about confusion and make accusations about each other. They must go in, clear it up, negotiate and talk, not walk.

Shona McIsaac (Cleethorpes): My right hon. Friend will be aware of the high concentration of oil refineries, power stations, chemical plants and other dangerous installations in my constituency. I hope that he will appreciate the concerns of residents living in their shadow. What more can be done to persuade Humberside fire brigade to react if there is an incident at one of them?

The Deputy Prime Minister: My hon. Friend makes a fair point about an area with which we are both familiar, because our constituencies adjoin the Humber, where many of the chemical and petrol complexes are sited. I have no doubt whatever that if a major incident occurred, many fire workers would turn out. The Flixborough incident many years ago is a good example. I have no doubt that many of them would say, "Let's get out there and do it." They did it last night. I cannot accept, however, that I should have to ring up some local committee to find out whether they are going to turn out. I could not come to the House with such a proposal. I say again to the Fire Brigades Union that it has an obligation to allow those who want to attend an incident to do so. There should be an agreement about that. I understand that an agreement was reached in Northern Ireland about how stations might be manned in certain circumstances, but the national body's intervention put an end to that 24 hours later. That is not acceptable.

Our responsibility—that of not only the Government but the whole House—is to maximise safety. We have the responsibility to defend our citizens, and I want to make it clear to the Fire Brigades Union, the House and everyone else that whatever we have to do to meet that requirement, I will do it and I will be accountable to the House for it.

BILLS PRESENTED

Health (Wales)

Secretary Peter Hain, supported by the Prime Minister, Mr. Secretary Prescott, Mr Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Secretary Blunkett, Mr. Secretary Milburn, Mr. Secretary Murphy, Mr. Secretary Smith, Mrs. Secretary Liddell and Mr. Don Touhig, presented a Bill to make provision about Community Health Councils in Wales; to establish and make provision about the Wales Centre for Health; and to make provision for the establishment of, and otherwise about, Health Professions Wales: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow, and to be printed. Explanatory notes to be printed. [Bill 1].

Extradition Bill

Mr. Secretary Blunkett, supported by the Prime Minister, Mr. Secretary Prescott, Mr. Secretary Straw, Mr. Secretary Murphy, Mrs. Secretary Liddell, Secretary Peter Hain and Mr. Bob Ainsworth, presented a Bill to make provision about extradition: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow, and to be printed. Explanatory notes to be printed. [Bill 2].

Regional Assemblies (Preparations)

Mr. Secretary Prescott, supported by the Prime Minister, Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Secretary Blunkett, Secretary Margaret Beckett, Mr. Secretary Darling, Mr. Secretary Milburn, Ms Secretary Hewitt, Mr. Secretary Clarke, Mr. Nick Raynsford and Mr. Christopher Leslie, presented a Bill to make provision for the holding of referendums about the establishment of elected assemblies for the regions of England (except London); for reviewing the structure of local government in regions where the holding of a referendum is under consideration; for implementing the recommendations of such reviews; for the Electoral Commission to give advice in connection with the establishment of assemblies; for payment of grant in connection with the activities of regional chambers; and for incurring expenditure in preparation for assemblies and in connection with the transfer of functions to them: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow, and to be printed. Explanatory notes to be printed. [Bill 3].

Community Care (Delayed Discharges etc.)

Mr. Secretary Milburn, supported by the Prime Minister, Mr. Secretary Prescott, Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Secretary Smith, Secretary Peter Hain, Mr. Paul Boateng and Jacqui Smith, presented a Bill to make provision requiring social services authorities to make payments in cases where the discharge of patients is delayed for reasons relating to the provision of community care services; and to enable the Secretary of State and the National Assembly for Wales to require certain community care services provided by social services authorities to be free of charge to persons receiving those services: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow, and to be printed. Explanatory notes to be printed. [Bill 4].

WELSH GRAND COMMITTEE

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Orders Nos. 107 and 108,

That—

(1) the matter of the Government's legislative programme as outlined in the Queen's Speech as it relates to Wales be referred to the Welsh Grand Committee for its consideration;

(2) the Committee shall meet at Westminster on Thursday 21st November at five minutes to Nine o'clock and at Two o'clock, to take questions under Standing Order No. 103 (Welsh Grand Committee (questions for oral answer)), and to consider the Government's legislative programme as outlined in the Queen's Speech as it relates to Wales under Standing Order No. 107 (Welsh Grand Committee (matters relating exclusively to Wales)); and

(3) at the meeting—
(a) the Chairman shall interrupt proceedings at Four o'clock; and
(b) at the conclusion of those proceedings a motion for the adjournment of the Committee may be made by a Minister of the Crown pursuant to Standing Order No. 108(5) (Welsh Grand Committee (sittings)).—*[Mr. Heppell.]*

Question agreed to.

Orders of the Day

Debate on the Address

[SECOND DAY]

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question [13 November],

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, as follows:

Most Gracious Sovereign,

We, Your Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, in Parliament assembled, beg leave to offer our humble thanks to Your Majesty for the Gracious Speech which Your Majesty has addressed to both Houses of Parliament.—*[Mr. Foulkes.]*

Question again proposed.

Health and Pensions

1.33 pm

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Alan Milburn): The Queen's Speech has at its heart a commitment to public services. Government Members stand for public services because we stand for a fairer society. For us, public services are social justice made real. On the national health service, we stand where we have always stood—for an NHS that is paid for by all and available to all, and provides patients with care that is free, based on the scale of their need, not the size of their wallet.

The NHS plan that we published two years ago sets out how we can build on those values to implement our programme of investment and reform for the health service. The Bills in the Queen's Speech drive forward the reforms, just as the Budget drove forward the investment. Just six years ago, spending on the NHS was falling in real terms. By 2008, it will have doubled in real terms. There is a similar story for social services. Whereas just six years ago, real terms spending there was rising by just 0.1 per cent. a year, it is now set to rise by 6 per cent. a year. Britain today has the fastest growing health care system of any major country in Europe.

The Budget laid to rest the decades-old fallacy in this country that somehow or other we could have world-class health care on the cheap. We cannot. A cheap health service delivers what the Conservatives delivered: cuts of 60,000 hospital beds, cuts of 23 per cent. in nurse training places and of 25 per cent. in general practitioners in training, and 400,000 more people waiting for hospital treatment at the end of their term in office than at the beginning. If we want world-class health care, it has got to be paid for. We on the Government Benches believe that it is right to ask people to pay a little more in tax to get a lot more into the national health service.

The Opposition imposed a three-line Whip against extra health spending—not a soft three-line Whip, but a hard one. Amazingly enough, there was not a single Tory rebel in sight.

Mr. Peter Lilley (Hitchin and Harpenden): No one denies that the Government have accelerated

expenditure, but can the Secretary of State confirm that the number of in-patient operations has grown more slowly since 1997?

Mr. Milburn: I think that I am right in saying—if not, I shall correct myself in writing to the right hon. Gentleman—that the number of hospital operations has grown by about 500,000 since 1997, the number of people seen in out-patients has grown by well over 1 million, and the number seen in accident and emergency has grown by about 500,000. However, the right hon. Gentleman must not become fixated by what happens in hospitals alone. I do not know about his constituency, but in mine, for example, procedures that used to take place in hospital are happening in the community, in out-patient departments, in GPs' surgeries, or in health centres. It is of course important that the appropriate care be given in the right place, but if he believes—I am sure that he is not falling for this fallacy—that national health service treatment is purely about hospital treatment, he has got it sadly wrong.

Conservatives often call for extra investment in their local health services, and I am prey to interventions from right hon. and hon. Members on such matters. However, if they are going to argue—as they do in interventions, Adjournment debates and questions—for more money for their local health services, they have to explain why they voted against more money for the whole health service. Conservative Members are not stupid—that is the preserve of the Liberal Democrats—and they know that resources deliver results. Why have we got 40,000 more nurses working in the national health service than in 1997? For the simple reason that we put the money in. Why are 10,000 more doctors working in the NHS? Because we put the money in. Why is the biggest hospital building programme in the history of the NHS happening, and why are there more, rather than fewer, beds in hospitals for the first time in 30 years? Because we put the money in.

Gregory Barker (Bexhill and Battle): No one doubts that, in keeping with the Secretary of State's comments, the taxpayer is paying a great deal more for the NHS than when Labour came to power in 1997. However, can he tell us why, after five years, 1 million people are still on NHS waiting lists?

Mr. Milburn: If I were the hon. Gentleman, I would exercise caution in two respects. First, when the Conservatives were in office for 18 years, they managed to increase waiting lists by 400,000. We have been in office for five years, and we have cut hospital waiting lists by 100,000. Secondly, it is no good his arguing that what is needed is more investment in the national health service if Conservatives are not prepared to put investment into it. We will not get waiting lists or waiting times down unless we grow the capacity of the NHS.

The hon. Gentleman must have read—I have read it, for heaven's sake—the Conservative policy document that was launched last month, entitled "Leadership with a Purpose". If ever a title expressed the triumph of hope over experience, that was it. The document states in bald terms:

"Conservatives do not support the tax and spending increases the Government has announced."

The hon. Gentleman and his right hon. and hon. Friends should be extremely cautious about arguing for more money for the NHS, unless they are prepared to vote for more money for the NHS.

It is true that waiting times for hospital operations are still too long, but it is worth recalling that the number of patients waiting more than 12 months for NHS treatment is down by 40 per cent., compared with March 1997. A year ago, the maximum wait for a heart operation was 18 months; today it is 12 months, and by next April it will be nine months. That is still too long, but the trend is in the right direction and, most importantly, during the past few years death rates for cancer have fallen by 6 per cent. and for heart disease by 14 per cent.

The Conservatives often say that they are opposed to our targets to reduce waiting times for treatment, yet they also know that waiting is the public's No. 1 concern about the NHS. By and large, once people get into the system they are satisfied with the quality of their treatment. Why? Because the doctors, nurses and other staff provide a high quality of service. It is the wait for that service that is the problem for far too many people. Does anyone seriously believe that waiting times would be falling so consistently had it not been for those targets?

We know what the Conservative strategy is. The hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) expressed it eloquently when he said that the Conservatives have to persuade the public first that the NHS is not working, secondly, that it never worked, and thirdly, that it never will work. However, for millions of our fellow citizens the NHS is working. It is delivering high quality care for millions of people every week.

We should be candid about two things, however. First, although there is progress, there is a long way to go. Turning around decades of neglect is not a battle for the short term; it is one for the long term. We have a 10-year NHS plan for one simple reason: it will take time and effort, as well as sustained resources, to deliver the world-class health care that we all want.

Secondly, investment alone will not deliver. The NHS needs reform as well as resources. Why? Because the world has changed and the NHS must keep pace.

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): Will the Secretary of State remind me which year of the 10-year plan we are in?

Mr. Milburn: I think that I answered questions from the hon. and learned Gentleman when I introduced the plan in the House. We published it in July 2000, so I think that he can work out where we are.

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras): Not without a fee.

Mr. Milburn: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend—at least, I am at this stage.

Sometimes, people in this country pretend that we are the only ones having to confront change—that our health care system is the only one to face changes in demography and an ageing population, the enormous possibilities but new pressures brought by new drugs and treatments, and the rise of a more consumerist set of

[Mr. Milburn]

public expectations. However, those waves of change are washing over every health care system in the world. That is why health care reform is at the top of the political agenda in almost every developed country.

The NHS is in a better position than most to confront those pressures. In a world where health care can do more but costs more than ever before, it is an enormous strength to have an NHS providing services that are free, and based on need, not on ability to pay.

The NHS provides what some call the security—what Nye Bevan called the "serenity"—of knowing that we all pay in when we are able to do so, so that we can all take out when we need to. The health of each of us depends on the contribution of all of us. That is the great strength of the NHS. Those values and principles are as strong for Britain today as when the national health service was first formed.

We must be honest, however; there are weaknesses, too, in the organisation of the NHS. In 50 years, health inequalities—the gap between rich and poor in terms of health outcomes—have widened rather than narrowed. Figures released by the Office for National Statistics just last week show that a boy born today in Manchester will live on average ten years less than a boy born in Dorset.

Uniformity in provision has not produced equality of outcome, nor has it produced equality of opportunity. Too often, the poorest services are in the poorest communities. If we want an NHS that is more tailored to the needs of local communities and more attuned to different local problems of poverty and deprivation, we have to move away from monolithic services and centralised control.

Different communities have different needs.

Mr. Paul Goodman (Wycombe): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Milburn: In a moment.

Overall, levels of infant mortality in our society are falling—thankfully—but in some of the poorest sections of society they are rising. In parts of London, 100 languages are spoken, which puts pressure on the NHS. In a city such as Bradford, the incidence of heart disease among Asian men and women makes the work of the NHS there different from its work in other parts of Britain. Fairness rightly demands that standards in heart or cancer services should be broadly the same in one part of the country as in another. That is why we have put in place a national framework of standards.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): Given that one of the weaknesses of a national pay bargaining system is that it inevitably fails to take into account higher costs of living in parts of the country where there are staff shortages that we need to tackle, will foundation hospitals have absolute discretion and control over pay? If not, how and to what extent will that freedom be circumscribed?

Mr. Milburn: I will deal with foundation hospitals in general in a moment, but pay is a very important question, and not only for those hospitals. Today, NHS trusts have discretion and have had it for many years. Indeed, many exercise it. When trusts are recruiting an anaesthetist or a nurse, there will often be an element of local discretion in their pay.

As the hon. Gentleman is aware, we are negotiating with the trade unions that represent the 900,000 health workers—nurses, porters, cooks, cleaners, scientists and technicians and so forth. This is the fourth year of our negotiations for what we call the agenda for change pay system. Those negotiations are going well. I hope that we can reach fruition before too long. At their heart is the simple idea that in a national system in which people rightly demand equity we need a broad national framework for pay so that people have some certainty about the sort of pay that they are likely to receive. However, as the hon. Gentleman and all right hon. and hon. Members know, different parts of the country have different housing and labour market pressures, so there needs to be some local flexibility in that national framework. That is what we need—a national framework and some local discretion.

I expect the first generation of NHS foundation hospitals as well as subsequent generations to want to take on board the agenda for change agreement, provided that we can reach it. They will therefore be able to exercise discretion and flexibility, but there will be a broad national framework too. We will see where we get to with the negotiations. I am not pre-judging the outcome and there is clearly some way to go, but we are making progress.

Dr. Brian Iddon (Bolton, South-East): I am pleased about my right hon. Friend's statement on dealing with constituencies with real health need. He will know that I have been campaigning for five years on behalf of my constituency, which started second from bottom in terms of being furthest from target. Although we have had a lot more money—I praise the Government for delivering that—we are still in that position relative to all other health authorities. Will he assure my constituents that we will target the real need that exists in certain constituencies—for example, in Manchester, which he just mentioned?

Mr. Milburn: I cannot assure my hon. Friend about that particular case. As he knows, the formula is still under review. However, when we make allocations to primary care trusts later this year, those will be based on a new formula that will give greater recognition to the problems of health need and health inequality of which he is all too painfully aware—and so am I. We have to get the balance right between recognising that there are different labour markets and different pressures, which the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) mentioned, and acknowledging that there are different health needs and big health inequalities. The formula will need to address that balance.

Mr. Dobson: Will my right hon. Friend confirm that after the 1997 general election we found that places such as Bolton and Tower Hamlets were far behind the notional sums to which they were entitled under the national formula, whereas Surrey, for example, was far in advance of its notional sum?

Mr. Milburn: My right hon. Friend's memory is serving him extremely well. That is precisely the case

and, as he knows, in the past couple of years we have adjusted the formula to recognise, first, that the current formula does not properly respect the health needs of different local communities—parts of Greater Manchester and the surrounding areas, for example, have benefited from that change—and secondly, that we also face labour market pressures in different parts of the country. Incidentally, those pressures are not confined to London. We made those adjustments pending the full-scale review of the formula.

Dr. Jenny Tonge (Richmond Park): Is the Secretary of State not being rather stupid himself in assuming that the inequalities of health in the population are due solely to the provision of health care? Surely they are as much to do with poor housing, environment and education, which are also the responsibility of the Government.

Mr. Milburn: I am almost deeply wounded by the hon. Lady's accusation. *[Interruption.]* The party of the vulnerable knows how vulnerable I feel.

The hon. Lady is clearly right to say that there are background causes for health poverty. Poverty is one, poor housing another and a bad environment a third.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): And lifestyle.

Mr. Milburn: The right hon. Gentleman is right; lifestyle is another issue. However, the hon. Lady is wrong in one fundamental respect. My right hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson), who intervened earlier, could also have said that when we considered these issues, there was inequality not only in outcomes but in access to service. People in the better-off parts of Leeds, for example, have three times the access to heart surgery that those in the poorest parts have, despite the fact that the incidence of heart disease is higher in the poorest parts.

That is because there is, unfortunately, an iron law about the provision of public services. People who are more articulate and better off—the middle class—tend to do better out of the public services than working-class people. We must put that right. I do not believe that national standards or uniformity of provision will, on their own, necessarily address the very different problems in various communities. National standards are beginning to deliver results to reduce unfairness in areas such as cancer, heart disease, care of the elderly and mental health. In the next few weeks, we will publish similar plans to improve diabetes services.

While I am on the subject of mental health, let me say that we will press ahead with reform of the mental health laws. The laws today are rooted in the 1950s. We need to strike a better balance between safeguarding the rights of individual patients and protecting both patients and the public. The draft Bill that we issued for consultation, after we had consulted following a Green Paper and a White Paper, has produced around 2,000 responses. When we have finished considering them, we will bring forward the Bill during this Session.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): Will the Secretary of State confirm that the Bill will not concentrate solely on the understandably controversial matter of people with untreatable personality disorders, but will also pay attention to an issue that has worried many of us—that people who have to have in-patient care for serious depression are put cheek by jowl with people who are seriously psychotic? In other words, there should be separate therapeutic environments for people with very different types of mental disorder.

Mr. Milburn: The hon. Gentleman makes an extremely good point. Inevitably, all the headlines will be about one aspect of the Bill; that is understandable. However, the Bill in its entirety is not about that issue. It is about how, from a system fundamentally based on 1950s legislation, to get a better balance between safeguarding individual patients' rights, and protecting the community as well as individual patients. It is absurd that, although most treatment takes place in the community rather than in hospital, because the current legislation does not allow compulsory treatment for the minority of patients who need it in the community, doctors must wait until they become so seriously ill that they are a threat to themselves or to others before they are admitted to hospital for compulsory treatment. That is palpable nonsense, and it is not good for the patient or for the community. That is what we must change. We will consider the responses extremely carefully. Make no mistake, reform must happen in mental health services, just as it must across the whole national health service.

National standards make a difference. Through the Commission for Health Improvement, the very real variations in performance that exist in the NHS are being tackled. Indeed, as the Queen's Speech made clear, we will now strengthen the system of national inspection so that there is more information, not just about health services in the public sector, but about health services in the private sector too. Wherever NHS patients are treated they have not just the right to a common ethos and a common system of inspection, but a right to know that standards are high. Our objective is to have good services not just in some places, but in all.

Laying down national standards does not by itself raise standards. That can happen only when staff feel involved and communities are more engaged. The top-down, centralised structure in the NHS has too often inhibited local innovation. Too often when I talk to front-line staff, they feel disempowered. Local communities feel disengaged. Individual patients have little say and precious little choice.

In today's consumer age that structure is no longer sustainable. Therefore, our reforms are designed to shift the balance of power in the NHS so that standards are national, but control is local.

Mr. Andrew Lansley (South Cambridgeshire) *rose—*

Dr. Evan Harris (Oxford, West and Abingdon) *rose—*

Mr. Milburn: I give way to the hon. Member for South Cambridgeshire (Mr. Lansley).

Mr. Lansley: While the Secretary of State is talking about national standards and access, will he tell the House to what extent the intention that there should be specialist stroke units in each district general hospital, which was the April 2002 target, has been met? In

[Mr. Lansley]

addition, will he reiterate the intention that all stroke patients should be treated in specialist stroke units by April 2004?

Mr. Milburn: The hon. Gentleman is referring to the national service framework for elderly care services. He is right that the intention is to have specialist stroke services by April 2004 in all parts of the country. We have made progress towards that, and I know that it is happening. We have two years to go, and we are making good progress. We have to learn from the stroke services that are being set up. I visited a specialist stroke service in the Freeman hospital in Newcastle, and I know what a difference it makes, not just to the care of the patients but to the morale of staff, who feel that they can use their specialist skills for the purpose for which they were designed—is to make sure that older people, in particular, get the quality of care that they need. We have made a start and I am confident that we will achieve our ambitions.

Dr. Harris: The Secretary of State talked about the importance of reform, and in these exchanges he has given the impression that only his party supports reform, and the Liberal Democrat and Conservative parties do not. I am happy to accept that the onus is on Opposition parties to recognise, as I do, that radical reform of the health service is necessary. Having started with insults, if he remains to hear my contribution, which he does not usually do—*[Interruption.]*—he will have an answer. The Secretary of State cannot start by insulting parties and then slope off before they are given a chance to respond. I accept his challenge that before criticising the reforms proposed by the Government, Opposition parties have to have their own proposals. That would be a test of effective opposition, and I hope that he will remain to hear what is offered on the menus today.

Mr. Milburn: As for my attendance at the hon. Gentleman's speeches, there are questions of decorum and good taste. I have heard him speak in this place and say different things almost in the same sentence to the same audience. I will stay and listen to him today. How is that? I must have nothing better to do.

Mr. Kevin Hughes (Doncaster, North): Now that my right hon. Friend is coming to the part of his speech about reform, will he take time to explain to the House how the introduction of foundation hospitals will not lead to a two-tier service? In addition, if foundation hospitals are going to improve services, will he say why they are to be introduced only in those areas where existing hospitals already give their communities good service?

Mr. Milburn: I will answer my hon. Friend's question, but I hope that he will let me get to the relevant section of my speech. If he wants to intervene then, I shall be happy to allow him to do so.

As I have said, we want to have national standards and local control. Next year, local PCTs will control three quarters of the NHS budget. They will have three-year budgets so that they can plan and deliver a better balance between prevention and treatment, and between services in the community and services in hospital. They will also be free to commission services from the most appropriate provider, regardless of whether that provider is in the public, private or voluntary sector. That will permit a greater diversity of provision and greater choice for patients.

In our country, of course, there has always been choice in health care, but it has been the exclusive preserve of those who can afford to pay. Equity demands that that choice is available to all, not just to some. People should not have to opt out of the NHS to get high quality treatment. They should be able to get choice on the NHS.

We have made a start, with heart patients now choosing where they should be treated. Our plan is to extend choice to all NHS patients. The more that hospitals do and the more patients they treat, the more resources they will get. Those local services that are doing less well will get more help, more support—including financial support—and, where necessary, more intervention. They will not be left to sink or swim. Conversely, those doing better will get more freedom.

Mr. Hilton Dawson (Lancaster and Wyre): Will my right hon. Friend assure me that everything that he has said about improving the quality of health services can be read across to the social care services? Will the important measures that he is introducing to extend devolution and local decision making refer to both health and social care, and to crucial partnerships at local level?

Mr. Milburn: My hon. Friend makes an extremely important point, and perhaps I have been remiss in not making it clear that a common set of principles should apply to all our public services. We want to raise standards everywhere, not just in some places. That is why we instituted national standards and systems of inspection, and why we made available the help and support that we now give. When the Government came to office, we had no way of generalising good practice. There was no mechanism by which we could tell the best clinicians and managers to take the lessons that they had learned from their working environments to other organisations that needed help, so that those organisations could learn the same lessons. However, that is what we do now.

My hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster and Wyre (Mr. Dawson) will also be aware that the response should always be the same where there is consistent management failure, be it in the private or the public sector. In such cases, we should change the management and bring new people in. The purpose of the new franchising proposals is to bring in new management. In those places where we have adopted it, that approach is beginning to produce results.

The same disciplines must apply in the social services as much as in the health service. That means that help, support and, where necessary, intervention are available in those areas that are not doing very well. Conversely, there are also incentives to improve, which brings me to the issue of NHS foundation hospitals.

NHS foundation hospitals will be part of the national health service. They will treat NHS patients according to NHS principles and to NHS standards, but they will

be controlled and run locally, not nationally. Indeed, they will draw on traditions that many Labour Members will recognise—the traditions of the co-operative movement and of friendly societies and mutual organisations in this country and abroad. NHS foundation hospitals will be owned and controlled by local communities, replacing central state ownership with a modern form of local public ownership.

How will that work? People living in communities served by a hospital will be its members and, therefore, its owners. Staff will also be members. Local people will elect representatives to serve as hospital governors. Those directly elected hospital governors will make up an absolute majority on the trust stakeholder council. The council in turn will hold the management board that is responsible for the day-to-day work of the hospital to account, elect the chair and non-executive members of the board and approve the appointment of the chief executive.

For the first time since 1948, the public will be genuinely at the heart of our key public service—the national health service. This reform will help bridge the democratic deficit that has for too long kept the public out when they should have been brought in. I will shortly publish a prospectus setting out more details on NHS foundation hospitals, but I can tell the House one more thing today.

Some people have concerns that foundation hospitals are about privatisation. That is simply not true. NHS foundation hospitals will be there to serve NHS patients, not to make profits or to distribute dividends. To prevent any future Government pursuing a privatisation agenda in the NHS, there will be a legal lock on the assets of NHS foundation trusts to protect them from the demutualisation that we have seen in the building society sector in recent years or any future threat of privatisation. Our reforms are about giving life to the Labour ideal of common ownership, not resurrecting the corpse of Tory privatisation. Our aim is to bind NHS hospitals ever closer to the communities that they serve. In that way, NHS foundation hospitals will be part of the NHS and will always remain part of the NHS.

Mr. Gareth Thomas (Harrow, West): As someone rooted in the co-operative traditions to which my right hon. Friend refers, I warmly welcome the proposals for foundation hospitals, not least because they offer the prospect of replacing local quangos, which are too often not accountable to local people, with democratically elected boards. Will my right hon. Friend be sympathetic to those local communities that are unhappy with the way in which their local hospital is run when they come to him asking for their hospital to be made a foundation hospital?

Mr. Milburn: I sympathise with my hon. Friend's point. I am aware of the views he has expressed and the measures that he has tried to take forward in the House to bring co-operation and mutualisation out of the last century and into this one. We have an opportunity to do that now through the NHS foundation hospital model. I want to deal with my hon. Friend's question and that asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster, North (Mr. Hughes).

We will start with the best performers; the first generation of foundation hospitals will be drawn from existing three-star trusts. Forty per cent. of the three-star trusts are in 25 per cent. of the most deprived areas in the country—places such as Bradford, Hackney, Liverpool or Sunderland. I do not know whether those hospitals will want to apply for foundation trust status, but I do know that, as more hospitals improve, more will become foundation trusts. As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has said, there will be no arbitrary cap on the number of foundation hospitals, so the charge that the policy is about creating a two-tier health service is simply not correct. This is not elitism; it is localism. It is not privatisation; it is a genuine form of public ownership. It is aimed at getting the best health care for the public by giving more control to the public.

Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): I am particularly concerned about localism. My right hon. Friend has previously given examples of how, for example, working class areas do less well than middle class areas in obtaining access to national health services. How will everyone's vote be equal? In my constituency, there are huge disparities of wealth and for many people English is not their first language. How can we be assured that foundation hospitals will genuinely reflect local issues? That is central if we are to make a success of them.

Mr. Milburn: The ballot box will be the great equaliser. In the end, whether people obtain access to services is at least in part dependent on their background and, sadly, their class, but their ability to exercise the vote is dependent on their willingness to exercise it. Everyone will have an equal vote and an equal say, and they will be able to determine who serves as a hospital governor. For the first time we can ensure—within the framework of the standards we have set, and with a common NHS ethos and a common system of inspection—that hospitals genuinely serve the needs of the local community.

I know that many Members will have their doubts, but I fundamentally believe that we have an opportunity to construct a new model that is consistent with the values and principles of the national health service, while giving more control to those who need it: the staff on the front line, and the communities that they serve.

Mr. Peter Mandelson (Hartlepool): My right hon. Friend does indeed seem to be describing an entirely new and imaginative model for the entire public service. Would he characterise it as the end of old-style, centralised, Morrisonian nationalisation as we know it?

Mr. Milburn: I do not really want to intrude on family matters, but I think that it does mark a break from the past, in terms of structure but not of values. Values endure, and I believe that the values of the national health service are fundamentally right—although views differ in different parts of the House.

It is clear from what happens in other European countries that it is possible to have both diversity of provision and the right values for care. We can have a range of service providers, but the service that they give to public health care can be based on a common set of values. I think that that is right, not because diversity

[Mr. Milburn]

should be an end in itself but because alongside the national standards for the delivery of equity must be local services that meet local need. If we are honest, we will acknowledge that over the last few decades that has not been possible, and that we must change the structure and the organisation.

Mr. Goodman: If a foundation trust falls in the Government's rankings from three-star to two-star status, will it remain a foundation trust?

Mr. Milburn: As I have said, in due course we will present a prospectus that will deal with issues such as that. I can say, however, that if foundation hospitals are part of the NHS family and are delivering services to NHS patients, they must abide by the same disciplines as other NHS hospitals. That means that they will receive ratings, and will be subject to the same inspections as other parts of the NHS. *[Interruption.]* If the right hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley) would stop chuntering and start listening, it might be helpful to all of us. If he wants to intervene, I will happily give way.

Mr. David Tredinnick (Bosworth) *rose—*

Mr. Milburn: I will have my dose of complementary therapy in a moment. First, let me deal with the question from the hon. Member for Wycombe (Mr. Goodman).

The expectation must be that as we are going to introduce the new arrangements in phases, and as the phases will begin with the best performers, foundation trusts will maintain—with greater freedom—a high level of performance.

Mr. Bob Blizzard (Waveney): Where foundation hospitals are operating in the way described by my right hon. Friend, fully accountable and responsive to local communities through the ballot box, will money from the Department of Health go to them directly rather than through local primary care trusts? Would that not make foundation hospitals more accountable to the community than PCTs?

Mr. Milburn: No. I think it right to have one form of commissioning. As I said earlier to the right hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden, we must ensure that all the growing resources for the NHS do not end up in the hospital sector. Hospitals will not be able to do what they need to do—reduce waiting times for treatment, improve the quality of care and so on—unless there are good services in the community, and in primary care as well. That is why we need strong local commissioning of services, which is the purpose of PCTs. They must be able to decide where resources should go in order to benefit the local community. Some will go to the hospital sector and some to the community sector; most, I expect, will go to the public sector, although some may go to the private sector. But alongside the providers must be commissioners of services.

Mr. Tom Levitt (High Peak): I am attracted by the model that my right hon. Friend has described, but what exactly does he mean by "accountable to local people"? There is no hospital trust in my constituency, and the four major hospitals that serve it are outside not just the constituency but the region. How might my local people be involved, at some time in the future, in this form of local democracy?

Mr. Milburn: I hope that when my hon. Friend sees the prospectus, he will agree that our proposals will achieve that.

Different trusts serve different populations, and not all trusts are the same. The Royal Marsden is a specialist cancer hospital. In a sense it does not really have a local community; its community is the community of patients whom it serves. They come from all parts of the country, because it is a tertiary centre. In my part of the country there is a very local trust that serves a distinct set of local communities. I do not know about my hon. Friend's area.

We must establish some principles for governance, but the governance structures must be flexible enough to take account of different needs and different local communities. That is why we will not lay down hard and fast rules, apart from saying one simple thing: if direct elections are to take place and if the mandate is to come from the local community, there must be an absolute majority of people from the local community serving on the stakeholder council, so that the public drive the changes that are necessary.

Rob Marris (Wolverhampton, South-West): When British Rail went through its botched privatisation we experienced fragmentation and then, following redundancies brought about by the privatised railway companies, a shortage of engine drivers in particular. Wages went through the roof. If we are to have local autonomy with regard to foundation hospitals, how will the Secretary of State avoid fragmentation and a consequent wage explosion when there is a shortage of health professionals?

Mr. Milburn: We will avoid fragmentation by means of the national framework of standards that we have established over recent years. Much of that framework, incidentally, was opposed by the Opposition. When my right hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras introduced legislation to create the National Institute for Clinical Excellence and the Commission for Health Improvement, and when we started to establish national service frameworks, both moves were opposed, because the Opposition genuinely want a free market in health care. We do not want that. We want national standards, and equity in the system.

My hon. Friend asked about wages in a constrained labour market. That applies to many, although not all, professions in the NHS, but even today there is an element of local pay bargaining. As I tried to convey earlier, we must have—and can have—a national framework, while respecting the fact that different local labour markets face different pressures. For instance, there is a problem at the John Radcliffe hospital, in the constituency of my right hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, East (Mr. Smith), the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions. That is largely because of local housing costs. It is different in my constituency.

Unless we can enable employers to act, we will never be able to tackle the different recruitment and retention problems.

Mr. Jim Cunningham (Coventry, South): Is my right hon. Friend saying that the new structures will replace the trusts?

Mr. Milburn: Yes, in a word. As we said in the NHS plan, the more performance improves, resources bite and reform takes hold, the more autonomy will be earned throughout the health service. This is a big change, but I believe it is the right change.

That brings me to the final measure in the Queen's Speech, the delayed discharges Bill. I believe that we owe a duty to today's generation of older people, because it was they who built and sustained public health and social services in our country. They deserve dignity and respect in old age, but being trapped in hospital when they want to be cared for at home denies them both. Delayed discharge from hospital is a serious problem. Since we put in an extra £300 million last year to deal with it, rates have fallen by more than 20 per cent., but even today, 5,000 older people are needlessly in hospital when they are ready to leave.

The Community Care (Delayed Discharges etc.) Bill, which we have introduced today, brings fundamental reforms to deal with that problem once and for all. Under the current system, for as long as the elderly person remains in hospital, for good reasons or bad, they remain there at the cost of the national health service. Under the new system, when the patient is ready and able to leave hospital, the cost will pass to social services. Where social services fulfil their responsibilities, we will look to give them extra rewards. Where they do not do so, they will have to pay the hospital for the costs that it incurs in providing care for the patients.

The interests of older people are not served by a blurring of responsibility. The costs of care should fall where they belong. The Bill will help to ensure that the money that we have made available to social services is spent on them, so that capacity can be built up and not cut.

Mr. Stephen Pound (Ealing, North): I am very grateful to my right hon. Friend for giving way. A decent, well-performing social services authority such as the London borough of Ealing will find itself being charged £2.2 million a year, on its anticipated figures, through the £120-a-night charge, because of forces beyond its control. I am sure that he has considered the fact that, in many cases, the beds that are needed to move people away from hospitals providing acute care are simply no longer available in the community.

Mr. Milburn: I understand the capacity problem, but we will again have a problem if we think that the only way of caring for older people is placing them in residential care homes. Of course, the care homes sector is extremely important, but it is worth listening to what older people themselves say about where they would like to be cared for. Overwhelmingly, they would prefer to be cared for not in a care home, but in their own home.

I understand the difficulties in different parts of the country. That is precisely why we provided in the Budget for a doubling of social services investment from this year to the next. That is not a 5 or 10 per cent. rise, but a doubling in the resources available to social services. However, social services must fulfil their responsibility. If my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Pound) stops to think about it, he will recognise the current problem. The hon. Member for Woodspring may stand up in a minute and say that what is happening is all about fining social services, but I disagree with that language. If he wants to use it, I say to him that social services are effectively fining the health service, because the costs are incurred in hospital, which cannot be right. Partnership works only when the health service and social services each accept their responsibilities, so we need an incentive for them to do so. That is what the Bill provides.

The reform programme set out in the Queen's Speech draws on the traditions of social and community ownership that I believe inspired the founders of the national health service. It sticks firmly to the principles on which the NHS was founded, but places a new premium on local accountability for local services. Reform cannot be achieved by holding on to the structures of the last century; it has to be shaped by the expectations of this century. Reform means investing not only extra resources in front-line services, but power, trust, ownership and control.

We on the Labour Benches have had the courage to raise the resources; we must now have the courage to make the reforms.

2.23 pm

Dr. Liam Fox (Woodspring): W. H. Auden once said that

"propaganda is a monologue that seeks not a response but an echo."

Sadly, for too long in the Government's approach to health, propaganda rather than substance has been the main currency. That is a very useful ploy when it is advanced by someone as plausible as the Secretary of State, but rather than getting a rational analysis of the current state of health care in the United Kingdom, we tend to be bombarded with statistics that too often seem to patients and medical professionals to belong to some sort of parallel universe rather than to Britain's NHS in 2002, the Labour party's sixth year in office.

As was obvious in the Secretary of State's remarks about foundation hospitals, the Government seem increasingly to make up policy as they go along in a series of knee-jerk reactions that occur when they are worried about their lack of delivery. Before we drug ourselves on yet more Government promises, let us take a rational view. We can see the clarity of thought and the intellectual cutting edge that Labour brought to health policy when it was elected in 1997 by looking at its manifesto. Indeed, it is very clear:

"New Labour is a party of ideas and ideals but not of outdated ideology. What counts is what works. The objectives are radical. The means will be modern".

That is the sort of psychobabble that we have all become used to in recent times. The manifesto says that Labour

"will not return to the top-down management of the 1970s".

[Dr. Liam Fox]

[Interruption.] There is no point in Front Benchers shouting; they can make their point later. The manifesto also says:

"The key is to root out unnecessary administrative cost, and to spend money on the right things".

It goes on to say:

"under the Tories, the administrative costs of purchasing care have undermined provision and the market system has distorted clinical priorities. Labour will cut costs by removing the bureaucratic processes of the internal market."

So has Labour returned to top-down management, cut administrative costs and dealt with distorted clinical priorities? When it came to power, there were 190,000 beds in the NHS; now there are 186,000—a reduction. There were 173,000 administrative staff; now there are 188,000—an increase. We now have more administrators than beds. When Labour came to office, the cost of administering the NHS was £270 million; the projected cost of administration for 2003–04 is £360 million—an increase in cost.

What about distorting clinical priorities? In the wake of the recent story that a senior surgeon at St. George's hospital in London had been told not to accept urgent surgical referrals from outside the London catchment area, the BMA warned that the performance targets had a distorting effect on clinical priorities. It said:

"This is a stark example of the perverse pressures which waiting list targets can create. Of course we want patients needing routine surgery to be treated promptly, but this must not be at the expense of life saving surgery for patients with complex injuries."

If the concept of the NHS is to have any practical meaning, surgeons with highly specialised skills must be able to offer their expertise outside the narrow catchment area of their own hospitals. However, the Government's centrally driven ideals are interfering with delivery locally and, worse, interfering with clinical priorities.

The problem for the Labour party is that, for far too long, it has believed its own propaganda. Essentially, its message in 1997 was, "There is nothing basically wrong with the NHS; if only those wicked Tories would spend more money on it." For five and a half years, they have therefore thrown more money—billions and billions of pounds—into the NHS, but what do we have in return? Despite a 10.8 per cent. funding increase between 1998–99 and 2001, hospital admissions have risen by only 0.9 per cent, as has been pointed out. Finished consultant episodes have risen by 2.3 per cent. The Secretary of State spoke about the maximum waiting time for a coronary bypass, but the average waiting time for a coronary artery bypass graft is now two weeks longer and there are still more than 1 million people on the waiting list. Some 80,000 fewer people are receiving domiciliary care. Emergency readmissions are increasing and have risen by 23,000 in the past two years. The Audit Commission, which is hardly an organ of the Conservative party, stated that in 1996, 73 per cent. of hospital patients in accident and emergency were seen by a doctor within an hour. That figure has now fallen to 53 per cent. Similarly, 90 per cent. of patients were admitted within four hours, but that has now fallen to 76 per cent. Some 60,000 fewer care home places exist than when Labour came to power in 1997. Those are the things which are causing the real difficulties for patients and which the Secretary of State is trying to get away from. Perhaps worst of all, 77,000 operations were cancelled last year—a 54 per cent. increase on 1997–98.

How can it be that such a big funding increase is taking place while things are getting so much worse at the front end? That is the question that the Secretary of State has to ask. If the public could ask one question, it would be: "Why is it that, with all this spending, our hospitals are so dirty?" It is this Government's sixth year in office, but 5,000 patients a year will die of the infections that they contract while they are in hospital. That is the equivalent of three Clapham rail disasters a week, which puts things into perspective.

Mr. Dawson: What does the hon. Gentleman think of the commitment to clinical priority and need of a consultant who told one of my constituents that he could not perform his operation on the NHS for approximately 10 months but that he could fit him in in the next fortnight if he wanted it done privately? What would he say to the consultant heart surgeon who responded to a question from me about waiting lists by stating, "We are dealing with more people, older people and sicker people than ever, with techniques that we were never able to use before."

Dr. Fox: The hon. Gentleman makes some important points. First, there will always be a difference between waiting times in a publicly funded service and those in a private service. That happens in every other country. The Secretary of State said today that the two sectors would continue to exist side by side. However, we should get proper value in the NHS for the consultant time for which we pay. All hon. Members would agree with that.

One problem, especially with cardiology, which the hon. Gentleman mentioned, is that management determines theatre time according to the maximum waiting time targets rather than according to clinical need, because funding depends on it. A reason for consultants' hostility to the Government's proposed contract is their fear that that trend will continue and worsen.

The hon. Gentleman made valid points, but the answers are much more complex than he suggests. Even if we accept the general points, pretending that a specific case is generic is typical of the Government's approach to health care.

The Government believe that they must always present the health care system in as rosy a light as possible. If they cannot distort what is happening, they change the presentation of the overall figures. One in eight hospital managers admits to distorting targets to fit the Government's NHS figures. One manager recently said:

"All chief executives in the region contrived to make the same 100 per cent. return to the Department of Health on absence of waits in A&E. This was done with the encouragement of the regional director because we all agreed the requirement was meaningless."

What sort of ethics is that on which to run a system?

Let me cite another example. The Government knew that their target of 2,000 extra GPs by 2004 would not be met, and they therefore merged two targets. They now say that 15,000 new GPs and consultants will be in place by 2008.

Delays for cancer treatment as opposed to diagnosis remain lengthy despite the Government's continual bragging. The number of patients who start radiotherapy within the Government's four-week target fell from 68 per cent. in 1998 to 32 per cent. in 2000.

Some Ministers are experts at breaking promises. For example, £50 million was promised for palliative care but only £4 million has reached the hospices. What is more, and worse, the Minister of State, who is not in his place, had the gall to launch the scheme in his constituency, but its hospice has not yet received any money.

The cumulative effect of centralisation, distortion and downright deception is shown in the plummeting morale of those who heroically work to keep the NHS running. The deprofessionalisation that they suffer is obvious in a growing crisis in the work force. For example, 24 per cent. of nurses on the UKCC register are over 50 and therefore eligible to retire soon. One third of all new entrants in 2001 were from outside the United Kingdom. NHS Professionals, which was set up to end the reliance on commercial nursing agencies, is in financial crisis, with up to £10 million in unpaid bills. It also relies on the very agencies that it was meant to replace.

The Royal College of Nursing claims

"there are around 20,000 nursing vacancies still—roughly the same as the number of agency nurses working in the NHS on a normal day . . . A third of new graduate nurses are not registering to practise".

What about nurses who leave the UK? A total of 6,021 left in 2002. That is the largest number for 10 years. Most headed for Australia or New Zealand.

Despite a Government pledge to recruit 2,000 extra midwives by 2004, the number has fallen since the target was set. The Royal College of Midwives said that there are now 45 fewer midwives than when the Government set the target.

James Purnell (Stalybridge and Hyde): Is not the hon. Gentleman's problem his inability to say that he would match our spending? Will he deny the widely circulated rumour that he asked the shadow Chancellor for such a pledge in order to solve the problem, but that his request was turned down?

Dr. Fox: I would not discuss with the hon. Gentleman any confidential conversations that I held with my colleagues. On expenditure, we will set amounts that are appropriate to our plans. The Government have set expenditure that is appropriate to their plans. Clearly, they are not delivering. The hon. Gentleman falls into a common trap for Labour Members. They believe that simply throwing money at the problem will solve it. One cannot solve the problem of a lack of professional people by throwing money at it. People have to be attracted into the professions. Demoralisation throughout the NHS makes recruitment and retention more difficult.

If nurses are demoralised, let us consider consultants. They have become increasingly disillusioned by the restrictions on their clinical freedom, manipulation of waiting lists and the burden of red tape. Let me give one example. Professor Irving Taylor, professor of surgery at University college London listed the various bodies that assess, appraise and validate his performance and activity. Nationally, they are: the General Medical Council, the UK Council for Regulation of Healthcare Professionals, the National Clinical Assessment Authority, the National Care Standards Commission, the Commission for Health Improvement, the National Patient Safety Agency and the cancer accreditation teams.

The bodies in Professor Taylor's hospital are: the clinical governance committee, the continuing professional development committee, the professional advisory panel, the clinical audit committee, the annual consultant appraisal, the junior doctors' hours action teams, the pre-registration house officer and senior house reviews for postgraduate dean, and the specialist registrar review for postgraduate dean and Royal College of Surgeons.

The university organisations are: the internal quality assurance committee, the staff review and development committee, the annual university appraisal, the quality assurance agency, the research assessment exercise, the peer review of teaching and the research governance committee. Twenty-two different bodies examine his professional life. Yet the Government were going to cut red tape.

Glenda Jackson: I am intrigued by Conservative party policies. Does the hon. Gentleman argue that he could attract more professionals to the NHS by reducing the amount of money that they would be paid? Does he claim that he would increase professional standards through training? When the Conservative party was in office, it reduced training places for nurses and doctors. Is reducing wages and educational opportunities the way in which to attract more professionals and to increase competence?

Dr. Fox: The hon. Lady is making Conservative policies up; we will determine the genuine policies. We can attract people to any profession if they are given professional satisfaction, the freedom to value their vocation and are allowed to use the skills that they have developed without interference by someone who has little understanding of what they do well.

I shall give an example of the way in which to demoralise nurses. A nurse with whom I worked for a long time, and who must have performed thousands of ear syringings tells me that she now has a 12-page protocol for ear syringing. Someone else is trying to tell her how to do a job that she has performed for many years. That is the way in which to demoralise and fail to retain professional people. We have experienced the effects of deprofessionalising the teaching profession. Surely we do not want that to happen in the nursing and medical professions.

Mr. Dawson: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Dr. Fox: I have already given way to the hon. Gentleman.

One of the other problems is that consultants have had pressure put on them to remove the longest waiters from the list irrespective of clinical urgency, and that has been done by failing to treat an increasing number of people waiting for under six months, resulting in the bunching up described in the recent King's Fund report.

[Dr. Fox]

Consultants were also outraged by the sheer clumsiness of the handling of the proposed new contract. In particular, they were upset by the Department of Health's presentation, which made it clear to them that management would use the new contract to instruct doctors what to do and which patients to see. That became a headline issue as a result of the infamous "slide 9" of the Department of Health's presentation. Everyone in the profession talked about it. It was big news. It appeared in the medical press. Yet the day after the contract was rejected, the Secretary of State said that he had never heard of it. That makes him either the most clueless or the most disingenuous Secretary of State that we have had for a long time.

But if anyone thinks that we have problems with consultants, they should look at general practice. One of the biggest problems—

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Maria Eagle): Tell us what you would do.

Dr. Fox: The Minister may not have gathered that we are debating the Queen's Speech. The reason why we come to the House of Commons is to discuss the Government's programme, which is what we are doing today, and point out the flaws in the Government's approach, which are all too easy to find.

One of the biggest problems with the Government's approach was summed up in the words of just one hon. Member when he said that it is all about schools and hospitals. The Prime Minister is the one who is most responsible for putting forward the idea that hospitals matter and nothing else, irrespective of the fact that 90 per cent. of our patient contacts take place elsewhere. To the Prime Minister it is all about hospitals, reinforcing the idea that it is the secondary sector that is important. What about the GPs, district nurses, midwives, practice nurses and all the therapists that my hon. Friend the Member for Bosworth (Mr. Tredinnick) is for ever going on about? All those people are important parts of the health care system and need to be recognised.

Mr. Tredinnick *rose—*

Dr. Fox: There are times when looking ahead is the best policy. I will give way later—much later.

When it comes to the national plan, for the Government to meet their GP targets they had to recruit an extra 2,000 GPs between 2000 and 2004. The net increase throughout the country in 2000 was 18, and in 2001 it was also 18, according to the Government's own figures in a written answer. GPs increasingly look to early retirement to escape from the burden of red tape and paperwork imposed by the Government. It is frightening that fewer GP trainees—those junior doctors who have undergone GP training—are deciding to go into a full-time career in general practice.

We have a particular problem that will hit us when the crisis of south Asian retirement arrives. Most hon. Members will understandably not be aware of that problem, but one in six GPs practising full-time in the NHS qualified medically in a south Asian medical school and two thirds of them will retire by 2007. It is unlikely that doctors who qualify in south Asia will be a source of general practice recruitment in the future. The posts from which south Asian qualifiers are retiring will be the most difficult to fill because they are often in the practice areas of highest need. So the biggest problem will be in the areas of greatest need and often the areas of greatest social deprivation.

The Secretary of State keeps telling us that the money that the Government are putting into the NHS will buy us more GPs and consultants. Where does he think we will buy them from—from GP Argos or the GP supermarket? There are not huge numbers out there waiting to be employed in the NHS. We will have to encourage them into the service.

Management is not immune to demoralisation. The Government's bungling approach to the NHS has resulted in the paradox of a system that is under-managed at the front end but over-bureaucratised from the centre. In other words, those at the sharp end are not allowed to manage because of endless interference from the centre. Is any of that the Government's fault? No. On "Newsnight" the Secretary of State said:

"We have national standards in place, if we have poor performance that is because of poor management"—

never poor policy.

Mr. Dobson: Does the hon. Gentleman not recognise that if the Government cannot find additional GPs and consultants it is because for 20 years the Tory Government did not recruit enough people into medical schools and postgraduate training?

Dr. Fox: It does not surprise me that the right hon. Gentleman fails to understand the essential point, which is that doctors undergoing GP training are not becoming full-time GPs because they find it an unattractive part of health care. That is the problem, and it is a cultural problem within medical employment. As long as the Government make things more and more difficult for GPs by increasing the amount of red tape, paperwork and restrictions that they face, that problem will continue. All that adds up to a picture of a Government who do not really understand that in a free society people cannot be forced into professions; they have to be attracted to them.

One other area that must worry us is the recent trend in the number of those applying to study medicine. Applications fell from more than 13,000 in 1996 to under 10,500 last year. We have seen a slight increase in the headline figure, but most medical experts have expressed worries about the quality and qualifications of applicants this year.

I said that I must give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Bosworth, and of course I must.

Mr. Tredinnick: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way to me, as he put it, much later. Surely the health service shortages that he is addressing must also be addressed from another angle, and that is by bringing in those who do not work in the health service but who are medical practitioners. Does he not agree that properly regulated herbal therapists, acupuncturists and homeopaths, for example, could ease the burden on doctors tremendously? Are not foundation hospitals a

great opportunity for new initiatives in terms of spreading the burden of the delivery of care—initiatives about which we have heard nothing from the Government?

Dr. Fox: As my hon. Friend is well aware, I think that we should be using all our medical professionals at the ceiling of their ability and skills, to ensure that we are using all our health professionals in the most appropriate way. Moreover, we must be able to prove that any expenditure on such solutions from the public purse is of equal validity and worth to that of other treatments in mainstream medicine. With those two provisos, I have no problem whatever with what my hon. Friend says.

That brings me to the issue of foundation hospitals, which my hon. Friend mentioned. That is one of the relatively few areas in which, if we drew our policies on a Venn diagram, the Secretary of State and I would find that there was quite an intersection. The concept of foundation hospitals is a good one and the policy is in a direction with which an incoming Conservative Government would be comfortable. We were therefore delighted this morning to hear that the current wave of foundation hospitals will be only a start and that the programme will be rolled out to encompass the whole of the NHS where possible. We want all hospitals to be foundation hospitals. If the principle is that they will provide better care to patients in the locality, all patients should be able to access such improvements. We should like to see the hospitals free, self-governing, independent and very much on the not-for-profit basis that the Secretary of State mentioned. We want to see an enabling state that will ensure that our health care is provided but does not see itself as a monopoly provider.

There are contradictions and confusions in the Government's approach, however, and there was certainly a strong feeling among Opposition Members that the Secretary of State had not previously considered many of the questions put by hon. Members on both sides of the House.

One of the most important issues affects my constituency. As has been said, local communities must hold trusts accountable, but what happens in constituencies such as mine that have no hospital trust? Which trust do we hold accountable? Those issues lie at the heart of the workability of the Government's scheme. My hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe (Mr. Goodman) raised the question of star ratings. If a hospital trust goes from three stars to two during the transition process, will it be ineligible for that transition or will hospitals simply not be subjected to star rating at all when they become foundation hospitals? Will the convenience of the system be put before the quality of rigour that the Government claim for the policy?

Clearly, there is huge tension in the Government between the so-called modernisers and those in No. 10 and the official voice of the Chancellor, Ed Balls, who gave the Chancellor's clear view when he spoke to *The Guardian* recently:

"We have to have the confidence to accept that there is a limit to how far you can apply market principles.

The NHS and our public services depend upon an ethic of public service and a commitment to the services. In an area like health or education, if you go down the marketising route, you run grave risks with that ethic of public service."

We all know exactly what that means in the code used by the Chancellor to fight turf wars with his Cabinet colleagues.

The briefings that we have received from the Secretary of State in the House differ from the reported briefings to chief executives across the health service. According to the *Health Service Journal*, the Government said in their latest briefing that

"foundations in five to 10 years would be the norm rather than the exception in the NHS."

To me, that implies a rather faster rolling out of the programme than that suggested by the Secretary of State today. The chief executives who went to the briefing by the Secretary of State and the Department of Health report hearing

"that freedom over pay and conditions would be 'absolute' for foundation"

hospitals. Again, that emphasis is rather different from that which the Secretary of State gave us today. In fact, he had already moved in that direction when, in January, he told the *Daily Express*:

"To argue that we should simply pay everybody the same regardless of labour market conditions is absurd."

I absolutely agree, and if he is willing to hold that line in the light of the undoubted reservations among those on his own Benches, he will have our particular support.

We need to move quickly, because of the points raised by many Labour Members on the risk of a two-tier system. The British Medical Association has laid the position out clearly:

"These freedoms ought to be available to all hospitals. Our prime concern must be to avoid creating a two-tier service in which patients who live near to Foundation Hospitals or are vocal and assertive in pressing to be referred to them, receive better services than those who are treated in other hospitals."

That is the essence of the point made by the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Glenda Jackson). The BMA continues:

"Similarly, if Foundation Hospitals have more ability to borrow money with the result that there is less opportunity for other hospitals to obtain the resources they need, inequity will result."

That will be a worry throughout the system, and it can be resolved only by not moving to a foundation model or by accepting at the outset that, in time, all hospitals will move to that model.

I hope that we get clear confirmation that all NHS hospitals will be foundation hospitals, because there is a worry for many of us who have been considering some Government reforms constructively, not least the relationship between primary care trusts and the aim of passing more money and more freedom down to them. There is a rumour, which I hope that the Secretary of State will dismiss now, that there will be new arrangements for foundation hospitals whereby PCT funding will be locked into contracts for five to seven years, thereby negating everything that the PCTs are supposed to be doing: exercising greater freedom over what they do with their funding and, according to the Government's release of a few weeks ago on NHS flows, money moving with the patient.

If the Government are saying that the freedom of PCTs will be sacrificed to give an element of stability to foundation hospitals, that is a significant policy change and the Secretary of State should tell us right now

[Dr. Fox]

whether the reports are correct or incorrect. That is vital to today's debate in the House. I take his silence to confirm that many of those rumours are correct.

Glenda Jackson: The hon. Gentleman has already told the House that the Conservatives welcome the idea of foundation hospitals because of the freedom that it would afford them, but, with respect and given his previous contributions, the freedom to do precisely what? He has already argued that money is not achieving any improvements in the NHS, that there are insufficient nurses and doctors and that there is far too much red tape. Given that that is his position, what will the foundation hospitals afford his party the freedom to do?

Dr. Fox: Making a mistake once is understandable, but making it twice—giving way again—is plain stupid. The hon. Lady must ask those questions primarily of the Secretary of State, as it is Government policy to introduce foundation hospitals. I have told her that I agree with the principle.

We studied foundation hospitals overseas and I asked what their most useful freedom was. They said that it was the freedom to borrow externally, because they can make quick decisions about investment, most notably in diagnostics, where patient treatment bottlenecks tend to occur. Such hospitals can also set their own pay and conditions to deal with recruitment and retention problems in their locality, and they can determine information technology strategies in line with their local health community.

There are three freedoms, for a start, that I would have thought most hon. Members agree with. The Government are right to move down that route and we shall support them, but we shall not support their proposals on the problem of delayed discharge, or bed blocking as it is known. The Secretary of State is quite right—he intends to fine local authorities. The Government say that they got that example from Sweden, but they could not have spent much time examining it, as they would have discovered that there are huge differences between the model employed in Sweden and that being used in the UK.

The Government would have found that Swedish local authorities are responsible for social care as well as hospital care, so they can affect the patient flows that result in bed blocking and delayed discharge. The problem in Britain is that the PCTs are responsible for patient throughput and patient flows, but local government is to be made financially liable for delayed discharging. In other words, local government will be punished for something over which it has absolutely no control. The proposal is preposterous. Have the Government thought about what it will mean on the ground? It will result in the worst perverse incentives in general practice.

Imagine a hard-pressed GP trying to get an elderly patient into a care home on a Friday afternoon—it is difficult to get a place. Under the Government's proposal, patients in an acute hospital will necessarily get first call on any care home beds that become available, so there will be an incentive for doctors to admit patients to acute hospitals as they will get first call and be most likely to get a care home bed as a result. That is a crazy policy, and its effect will be exactly the opposite of what the Government expect. If anything, it may worsen delayed discharges in the health system.

The Government have proposals on mental health. The Secretary of State told us on this morning's "Today" programme, as he has just told the House, that the Bill will return during this Session after the consultation has been considered. He said that the number of consultations is one reason for the delay, but it cannot be that hard to understand the point that nobody supports the Bill. All the consultations are hostile, and the Royal College of Psychiatrists, Mind, SANE, the BMA, the Royal College of Nursing, the Conservative party, the Liberal Democrat party, many Labour MPs and most Labour peers are all totally against what is proposed. The Bill is not a mental health Bill, but a personality disorder Bill dressed up to look like a mental health Bill.

If the Government bring the Bill back in its current form, they are as stupid as they are arrogant. It is stigmatising, regressive and an affront to our civil liberties, and we shall join forces inside and outside Parliament to stop it, as it must not become the law of this country.

Where the Government's programme will improve health care and coincides with our views, we will support it, even if the Government cannot muster support on their own Benches, but we will continue to expose the distortions of the truth, the propaganda and the spin that is this Government. Some things are for sure: they will tax more and more, they will spend more and more but they will disappoint and fail to deliver. The real losers, sadly, will not be the politicians but the patients.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. I remind the House that a 12-minute limit on Back-Bench speeches will apply.

3 pm

Mr. Stephen Byers (Tyneside, North): This is my first contribution in the House from the Back Benches for more than eight years. I no longer have the convenience and comfort of resting on the Dispatch Box, sometimes using it as a means of physical protection, or the tumbler of water always ready. I have to admit that there have been times when I have addressed the House in the past 12 months when something stronger than water might have been helpful.

On the Back Benches, I have the time and opportunity to reflect on the direction of the Government and the way in which they should respond to meet people's needs and aspirations. I have the opportunity to challenge the Government if they slow the pace of reform and modernisation that will be vital if we are to introduce policies for the common good of the people of our country.

The Queen's Speech and the Budget are perhaps the two timetabled items in the parliamentary calendar that say everything about the Government of the day. They identify priorities and reorder the programme of the

Government. They should underpin the values and principles of the political party that has been elected to office at that time.

In government, it is often a race against time. It is worth reflecting on the fact that when the period of the Queen's Speech is over and the programme is put into place by the autumn of next year, half the lifetime of this Government will be over. In the autumn of 2003, we will probably be less than two and a half years from the next general election, so it is a race against time for the Government, with people's expectations rightly raised.

This Queen's Speech gets it broadly right. Stressing the need for a strong society based on rights and responsibilities is what people want. We need to push forward with our reform of public services, so that they are more responsive, meet the high standards that people want and give them choice.

This stage of a Parliament is often the most challenging for a Government. Vested interests regroup, voices call for consolidation and some even argue for a change and reconsideration of our objectives and direction, but this is not the time to stand still, cling to the comfort blanket of the status quo and opt for a quiet life by leaving things as they are.

We live in a world whose chief characteristic is change. Force of change outside our country is driving the need for change within it. Our people have new ambitions, different priorities and raised expectations. If the Government or indeed any political party fail to reflect that reality, they will quickly become redundant and their ideas will become dogma.

That is why the Labour party has changed. That has been reflected in the Queen's Speech. We have made changes, not to betray our principles as the Labour party but to fulfil them by being in office, not to lose our identity as a political party but to keep our relevance to the people of our country. I appreciate that for many in the Labour party that has been a difficult and sometimes painful process but in this modern world—I think that the Conservative party may be learning this—to fail to embrace change is to condemn oneself to almost permanent Opposition.

It is vital that, in government, we continue to make the changes necessary to ensure that we keep in touch and reflect the needs and aspirations of the British people. To achieve that in office will require as much fresh thinking, new ideas and courage as was necessary during the 1990s to make the Labour party electable again. That is why I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health, who, in making the proposals for foundation hospitals, has shown how fresh, new thinking to identify and meet the needs of the present day can be embedded in the values and principles of the Labour party that was founded over 100 years ago.

We need to change the political landscape so that it reflects our values and principles. We need to seek a new political consensus to sustain us in office. That consensus must recognise that social justice and economic efficiency are two sides of the same coin—they are not in conflict with each other; one feeds off the other. Opportunities should be extended to our people so that everyone can achieve their full potential with their talents. Rights must be coupled with responsibilities. It should be recognised that an individual does best in a strong community and a society of others, and that greater investment is needed to improve public services, which must be reformed and modernised to meet the demands of the 21st century. That is the consensus around which we can unite as a country and that is reflected in the Queen's Speech.

We like as a Government to say that we are for the many and not the few. We must show that that is more than just a political slogan or a convenient soundbite and put real substance on it. That is a challenge for the Government.

There are a number of ways to meet that challenge. It is important because it identifies a key political division, a divide between political parties. The Conservative party, although it may say otherwise, will always be the party that wants to pander to an elite. That runs deep in its history and I do not believe that it is ever going to change. We, however, based on our history as a political party, recognise that there is too much wasted talent, too much inequality, and that people with potential are being wasted.

It is a challenge for the Government to change that, to ensure that we can deliver for all our people and to liberate those individuals. We do it for them and for our country because we all benefit. We will not have a strong and robust economy if we have a weak and divided society. That is why all people have a part to play.

The Government need to deal with the difficult issue about inequality of assets and wealth. We have done a lot to tackle the inequality of income. We have introduced the national minimum wage, the working families tax credit and the child tax credit. All that will make a difference. It will take many people out of the daily grind of poverty, but we now need to turn our attention to a far more difficult issue: inequality of assets. By that, I mean people who have no savings, who do not own their own home and who do not have investments in shares and so on.

That is important because an increasing number of people in Britain are without assets and the position is getting worse. The new divisions that we have to tackle are between the asset-excluded, the asset-poor and the asset-rich. In 1996, according to the Institute for Public Policy Research, 10 per cent. of the UK population had no assets. Now 20 per cent. of those aged between 20 and 34 have no assets. Figures given to me just this week by the House of Commons Library show that in 2001, more than 50 per cent. of the population had savings of less than £1,500. We have to find ways of ensuring that all people can have assets that they can call their own.

The Labour party manifesto in 2001 contained two proposals that could make a real difference. The first was the introduction of equity shares for tenants in social housing and the second was the creation of a child trust fund through an endowment paid by the Government. That is sometimes referred to as a baby bond. The lump sum would not be means-tested. It would be paid into an account on birth and drawn down at the age of 18. Every person from whatever background would have access to their own opportunity fund at the age of 18. The cost would be significant as an endowment fund of £1,000 would cost some £700 million in benefit, but I consider that it should be a priority. Equity shares should also be pursued.

[Mr. Stephen Byers]

As I said earlier, the Queen's Speech gets it broadly right. It addresses the need to reform our public services and rebalance our criminal justice system so that people recognise their rights and responsibilities. It meets the challenges of the day. The public want it and it is now the Government's responsibility to deliver. I am confident that they will discharge that responsibility.

3.12 pm

Dr. Evan Harris (Oxford, West and Abingdon): It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Tyneside, North (Mr. Byers), whose speech reflected the usual tone of Queen's Speech debates—that new thinking is the order of the day, as well as more profound reflections on the topics in the Queen's Speech. In contrast, Front-Bench Members are forced to deal with the detail of the proposed measures and with party political differences. The right hon. Gentleman was correct in his view that the Government need to think about reform and to have fresh ideas, and that requires courage. However, the same applies to Opposition parties. It is a particular challenge to Opposition parties, who could just about get by simply criticising the Government. That is tempting in many ways, but democracy—particularly with a lower turnout—requires us to provide an alternative option where we disagree. I have heard the Secretary of State say, when presented with opposition to some of his reforms, "What was the alternative?" That is a question that he has fairly asked the Liberal Democrats and the Conservatives. We have now developed our policies and I shall share them briefly with him, as he will probably want to oppose them. The right hon. Member for Tyneside, North referred to the challenge of recognising that times are changing and that there is a need for reform, and that challenge applies to Opposition parties, too.

Before getting into the detail of NHS reform, I want to say how much I welcome the remarks of the Secretary of State about the mental health Bill. It is wrong for an Opposition party to call for a measure to be withdrawn for further consideration and then to attack the Government for doing just that. My right hon. Friend the Member for Ross, Skye and Inverness, West (Mr. Kennedy) stressed the need for wider legislation on mental health and said that the matter should not be shelved simply because the Government were experiencing difficulties in attempting to tackle what it perceives as an unreasonable risk to the community. The Government are taking the right approach in looking at the consultation and, we hope, bringing back the Bill in a more acceptable form. I accept that we will still have disagreements, but Opposition parties need to recognise that these are difficult issues.

It is not the case, as the hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) suggested that there is no organisation in support of the Government's proposals on people with severe personality disorders who pose a potential danger to the public. The Zito Trust, which was founded as the result of a homicide by someone who was mentally ill, supports those measures. As the Secretary of State said previously, such incidents create difficulties for the Government, who are under pressure to ensure that the public feel safe—and, indeed, are safe. So the disagreement is not over the principle of the need to do something, but whether the need is as serious as the Government seem to state it and whether the particular way in which they wish to tackle it is right. I agree with the hon. Member for Woodspring that it is wholly wrong. Part of the problem is that there is a perception, stated previously by the right hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) that community care has failed so we have to do something. I hope that the right hon. Gentleman has had a chance to reflect on that pronouncement, which he made at the Dispatch Box. Many people would argue that community care was never tried properly because it was never properly funded. In that respect, I welcome the resources that the Government are putting in. It would be unfortunate to say that the die is cast and the sentence has been passed even before those resources work through the system.

Mr. Dobson: We are talking about reality, not about what we might have liked to happen when the Tories were in government. The fact is that there was not enough money to make care in the community work and that was one of the reasons why it failed.

Dr. Harris: The point that I was trying to make is that saying that because care in the community had failed—mainly due to lack of resources—we needed to lock people up, and that providing care in the community for people who may pose a danger, mainly to themselves rather than to other people, is wrong, seems to be the wrong approach. We should try putting in more resources, because, as the right hon. Gentleman knows, most of the homicides—which have not increased in number over many decades—are due to the failure of services to connect with vulnerable people who need support, not to people being maintained on care plans in the community who then go out and commit these acts. The resources have to be given a chance to work.

Dr. Fox: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that it is a fair representation of the position to say that there is an overwhelming consensus that we need to update our mental health laws and that that would be entirely possible in a very constructive spirit, but that the stumbling block is the Government's inflexibility and their insistence on putting severe personality disorders and a specific way of dealing with them at the centre of the Bill?

Dr. Harris: The hon. Gentleman is quite right about that. Mental health legislation is rather like measures on adoption and children, in that there should be no need for significant cross-party oppositionitis—*[Interruption.]*—although some people still manage to disagree on party political issues. It is a good thing for the hon. Member for North-East Hertfordshire (Mr. Heald) that there will be no need for him to miss out in participating in a mental health Bill now. He has been most assiduous in his work on the subject and I congratulate him on his promotion in the recent shadow Cabinet reshuffle.

On the general issues regarding reform, there is a temptation to call the Government's latest NHS reform Bill the "re-re-re-reform" Bill as it is the Government's fourth attempt. That is not to say that we are opposed to reform, although we are opposed to serial structural

changes when they are the wrong reforms. However, the onus is on Opposition parties to come up with alternative reforms.

To use the same language as the Government, the Liberal Democrats are proposing decentralisation and democratisation, of the commissioning function in particular. We believe that whether or not it is the case at the moment, the key decisions in the health service should be made by commissioning bodies in charge of the strategy for the health service and what it should or should not provide. It is not a provider issue, but a commissioning or, to use an old-fashioned term, a purchasing issue. That function needs to be more decentralised and more in touch democratically with the local community.

The hon. Member for Wakefield (Mr. Hinchliffe), the Chairman of the Select Committee on Health, unusually is not here today. I understand that he is away on Select Committee business. He has said clearly that if local authorities can decide what social services to commission, there is no reason why they cannot also decide what local health services to commission. It would do away with the so-called "Berlin wall" if the same local authority committee was dealing with the commissioning of both health and social services. Two further things are needed for that to work. First, there must be tax-raising powers locally so that commissioning bodies have the ability to increase or, possibly, decrease taxes according to what the public want. It would be wrong and inconsistent to call for more decentralisation of responsibility for commissioning without giving those concerned the ability, through fair local taxation, to raise the resources needed, as they see fit, to increase the amount of services that can be provided.

Secondly, those bodies must be explicit and honest about rationing and what can and cannot be afforded. I know that there are Conservative Members who have come round to this view, most notably the right hon. Member for Maidstone and The Weald (Miss Widdecombe) while she was shadow Secretary of State for Health. Part of the problem at the moment for those of us who want to see the NHS grow is that people think that that can happen without putting in the resources.

It would be easier for the Secretary of State and me to promote the idea of paying for a bigger, wider and more universal NHS through fair taxation if the voters knew that because they were not providing enough through that means, certain things were not available. Hiding behind rationing decisions made by organisations such as the National Institute for Clinical Excellence or local clinicians leads to an unfortunate side effect, which is that people do not recognise how much rationing there is.

We want decentralisation to democratic regional bodies that can look after the strategic role in decision making, and we want the decentralisation of commissioning to local authorities. The problem with primary care trusts is that there is no democratic local representation on them, and that is required. Local authorities need to be informed by a strengthened public health function, bringing together all public health functions including housing and environmental health, which are currently already the responsibility of local authorities. They also need to be informed by the PCTs and by patient stakeholders. However, the responsibility must lie with decision makers.

I understand that the Secretary of State has to leave shortly and I am grateful that he has listened so far, if only so that he is better able to attack the policies that I have proposed, rather than the personalities involved. We see the need for greater diversity in provision, so we are with the right hon. Gentleman in respect of the Government's proposal of foundation hospitals as new public benefit organisations and their move away from the one-size-fits-all approach to the question of who provides NHS care. We see a role for public benefit organisations, but they must not be top-down. The fact that the Government are centralising as they claim to decentralise is unfortunate. Why force that status on a select group of hospitals? Why not allow local communities—whatever the star status of the hospitals in these sham performance ratings—to choose whether the hospitals are public benefit organisations? There should be no cash incentives or bribes for that status because that would create the sort of inequity that has been referred to already by a number of hon. Members. That is not the way in which public benefit organisations should develop—just as it is wrong that the private sector should have any advantage, such as not having to train the health service workers whom it employs. The private sector should not cherry-pick or poach them from the health service. In the same way, new public benefit organisations should not have advantages handed down.

The next criterion is that foundation hospitals must be independent from the Department of Health, if the Secretary of State is serious. I question how independent from Department of Health policy they will be. In a press release on 22 May, the Secretary of State talked about NHS foundation hospitals being established as

"free-standing legal entities, free from direction by the Secretary of State for Health."

However, he recognises that, by proxy, there are plenty of ways in which the Secretary of State has influence over those hospitals. For example, they will be subject to inspection by the new commission. One of the concerns we have about that commission is that it will inspect on the basis of performance targets that are set by the Department. That is not a truly independent inspectorate; it should be allowed to choose its meaningful performance measures, rather than the distorting, meaningless ones that have been discussed here.

In the same vein, the Secretary of State will admit—because he has written it in a document—that the hospitals will not be independent because they will be subject to performance monitoring from the commissioners. I have nothing against that, but the right hon. Gentleman has admitted that the commissioners, the PCTs, who are contracting with the foundation hospitals, will have to commission to the targets that he sets. In a document on foundation hospitals that was published in the summer, he talks about:

"Hard-edged cash for performance contracts with commissioners"

In paragraph 3.7 of the document, the Secretary of State says:

"Commissioners will be able to hold NHS Foundation Trusts to account for service delivery and for their contribution to delivering on local health strategies and meeting targets through

[Dr. Harris]

legally enforceable 'arm's length' contracts. Contracts will encompass both incentives for good performance and penalties for poor performance."

That encapsulates our two concerns: first, that the Department's centralised target culture will impact on all the hospitals—certainly those that are still under the cosh in terms of targets and even the new foundation hospitals, through the contracts that commissioners will be forced to enforce—and secondly, that there will be cash incentives and fines for sometimes putting patients' needs before politicians' needs by meeting the needs of patients rather than distorting clinical priorities.

The mark of a sensible politician is to say that a Secretary of State from his party would not be allowed to set these targets. I know that that is tempting when the Secretary of State says that the first concern of patients is the amount of time that they have to wait. However, there is an added onus on politicians and those who provide the service, which is to treat the sickest quickest. The problem with maximum waiting time targets—even in terms of coronary heart disease, which the Secretary of State just mentioned—is that the most urgent patient is the one coming up to the politically imposed deadline. As the hon. Member for Woodspring said, the people who need more urgent surgery—for example, people with left main-stem disease or critical ischaemia, who are at risk of dying if they are not treated within a week—may well find their operations postponed so that the political targets are met first. In those two respects, the Government have still to demonstrate how foundation hospitals will be as truly independent of Whitehall control as the Government's rhetoric suggests.

There are a number of issues about foundation hospitals on which I would like clarification. First, what will be the constituency for elections to the boards? That point has been made also by the hon. Member for High Peak (Mr. Levitt). How truly democratic will the elections be when one will have to elect to be a member of the public benefit organisation? As the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Glenda Jackson) rightly said, that will mean that the middle classes—who tend to have the luxuries of time and health which enable them to be more involved in these issues—will tend to dominate. How will the Secretary of State tackle the democratic deficit and the mismatch between the accountability of provider organisations and the commissioning organisations—the PCTs—which are professionally run and accountable only, and too much, to the Department?

Will the Secretary of State answer the question about the disposal of assets of these organisations? For example, he said in a press release on 18 April that the first foundation hospitals would have freedom and flexibility within the new NHS pay systems to reward staff appropriately—I shall come back to that—and full control over all assets and retention of land sales. Some hospitals often have greater land assets than others. That is not because they deserve them; it is a quirk of history. In some areas—for example, the south-east—that land value will be greater than in other areas. Is it equitable that the revenue from those sales is not redistributed according to need, rather than history, as seems to be the proposal?

We are concerned about freedom over pay. There is a need to ensure that there can be more local pay flexibility, but it seems rational to avoid cherry-picking by foundation hospitals by allowing local pay only where there is local revenue raising. If communities want to respond to the labour market, they should recognise that they may have to do so through higher local taxes, feeding into higher pay in those hospitals. That is a consistent approach, and must be better than simply giving money to certain hospitals and allowing them to cherry-pick. Not only the British Medical Association and the Royal College of Nursing but the NHS Confederation is equally concerned about that.

For the commission for health care audit and inspection to be truly independent, it must be allowed—from the beginning, not some way down the road—to set its own targets rather than simply measuring how hospitals jump through hoops set by central Government. I hope that there will be cross-party support, perhaps in another place, to ensure that it has that true independence. It is unfortunate, to say the least, that this is now the fourth reorganisation of inspectorates. The first NHS reform Bill set up the Commission for Health Improvement, which we supported, with reservations on its independence, then the National Care Standards Commission was set up under the Care Standards Act 2000, then the next NHS re-reform Bill amended the provisions affecting CHI, and as soon as the NCSC was set up the Government agreed to merge the inspectorates so that private and NHS hospitals, for example, have the same inspection regime. If media reports that Sir Ian Kennedy has been appointed to head the new commission are correct, I have more confidence that it will be truly independent, but if the statute says that it must do the bidding of the DOH in its performance monitoring, independence will be a major concern.

It is important to consider the delayed discharges measures. Not a single organisation supports the proposals. If there is no capacity, there is no capacity. Fining hard-pressed local authorities and social services departments for the failure of investment from the time of the Conservative Government until 1999–2000, which marks the end of cuts in real terms for social services, is not only unfair but an insult to those local authorities who work so hard to make ends meet.

We have already heard about some of the distortions that the fines will create. There will be a distortion of resource allocation, as local authorities seek to avoid losing money overall. In some areas where there is still discretion within the tight standard spending assessment boundaries, some services will be de-funded in favour of social services, because of the double jeopardy created by the fining. There will also be a distortion of resource allocation within social services, as the vulnerable young, the mentally ill and the disabled suffer cuts in their allocations by local authorities desperate to avoid losing money through fines for delayed discharges. There will also be a distortion of resource allocation within care services for the elderly, as money is provided for intermediate care and care packages for elderly people leaving hospital at the expense of other provision for the elderly.

Dr. Andrew Murrison (Westbury): Will not fines on social services inevitably be levied on council tax payers,

and as the representative of a party that is so keen on local taxation, does not the hon. Gentleman welcome that?

Dr. Harris: I am delighted that the hon. Gentleman asked me that, because we have made it clear that we want council tax to be abolished and replaced by a fair tax. Even if there is a fair tax, such as a local income tax, it is wrong for the Government to transfer responsibility—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) asks why local income tax is fairer than council tax. I do not think that the idea of progressivity in taxation, which should be understood by a party purporting to support the vulnerable, has filtered down to him on the Conservative Front Bench. He would find it hard to argue in front of any audience for a property tax in which the highest band is barely twice the level of the lowest, even though the disparities in ability to pay—a foreign concept to him, perhaps—may be much greater.

The hon. Member for Westbury (Dr. Murrison) was right to imply that it is wrong for the Government stealthily to transfer central funding responsibilities to local tax payers. That would be so even if there was a fair tax, but it is even worse when there is a regressive tax. Council tax rises, which have been above inflation, have the greatest impact on people on fixed incomes, such as elderly widows and widowers who have been left in larger houses that attract a higher council tax. Council tax rises are already increasing as a result of the reallocation of taxation from central to local government. Central Government take the praise for cutting tax or holding it down, while blaming local authorities—even their own party's—for raising it.

Dr. Tonge: I am not clear how much the fines are going to be. If the fine is less than the local authority would normally pay for a person in a residential home, there is no point in its trying harder to find a place. Would not it be better to charge the same as the cost of a residential home, levying it in the same way, with the patient having to sell their home if necessary—although that might mean the local authority leaving them there indefinitely—and would it—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): Order.

Dr. Harris: The level of the fines is a concern, although not the major concern, and the Government have produced different figures and have not been clear. In a parliamentary answer to my hon. Friend the Member for Sutton and Cheam (Mr. Burstow), the Minister of State, the hon. Member for Redditch (Jacqui Smith), said that the reimbursement—the fine—for delayed discharge should be £120 a day in London and the south-east, and £100 throughout the rest of England. That is hundreds of pounds a week.

The problem is not only the level of the fine but the fact that people will be fined for something that is not in their control. The fines will create resource allocation distortions and we will end up with game playing between hospitals seeking to discharge or get the fine, and local authorities, and indeed carers, concerned about whether patients are fit for discharge. Indeed, we are already beginning to see premature discharge from hospital departments. Between April 2001 and March 2002, 122,881 people over the age of 75 were readmitted as an emergency within 28 days of discharge. That is a 14 per cent. increase over the period between April 1999 and March 2000. There was a 5 per cent. increase in the total number of people readmitted as an emergency within 28 days in 2001-02, despite what the DOH document on implementation of the NHS plan says is the Government's intention:

> "Nationally, to ensure that average growth...in the per capita rate of emergency admissions for people aged 75 and over is less than 2 per cent., and that the rate of emergency readmissions within 28 days of discharge does not increase."

There will be greater conflict between hospitals and social services, and with carers, who have been completely forgotten in this matter. Carers often bear the brunt of looking after people who have been discharged from hospital, not all of whom go to care homes. Carers UK is wholly opposed to the measure, although it would support an honest and sensible approach to tackle delayed discharges.

In Scotland, a different approach is taken—trying to identify and share good practice. The Government in Scotland, who have a Labour influence, have rejected the approach proposed by the Westminster Government, and I hope that, even at this late stage, the Government will reconsider their approach.

Although there are some aspects of this legislation that we will support, there are plenty of others on which we will oppose the Government. If they are serious about reform, I hope that they will listen to the concerns raised and alternatives put, recognise the need for true independence for the health care inspectorate, for example, and recognise that, if we are to go down the path of public benefit organisations, equity must be protected. There must be no cherry-picking of staff, and no bribes or incentives. The Government must be consistent. They cannot say, as they did in 1997, that they oppose two-tierism in general practice, and then say that they support it in hospitals. They cannot say that they oppose GP fundholding, and then introduce hospital fundholding. More than anything else, after this Queen's Speech the Government have more questions to answer than they have answered so far.

Mr. Forth: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Earlier today, I raised with the Leader of the House the question of the new procedure for written ministerial statements. I was particularly worried about the fact that they might trickle out during the day, and that Members might not therefore have proper access to them. There are 10 such statements listed on today's Order Paper. I have just checked with the Library, and one of them was in the Library at 9.30 this morning—demonstrating that that can indeed be done—another arrived at 11.30 am, and six arrived between 12 noon and 1 pm. However, one statement has yet to reach the Library.

I hope that you agree, Madam Deputy Speaker, that it is unacceptable for the Government to handle the new procedure in this shoddy way. Members must have a reasonable expectation of when written ministerial statements will arrive in the House and be available for them to deal with as they wish. I hope that at this very early stage, the House authorities will make it clear to the Government and to Departments that we expect written ministerial statements of which notice is given

[Mr. Forth]

on the Order Paper to be available to Members in the Library in a timely fashion each day, rather than trickling out. The House has already sat for four hours, yet one such statement—from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister—is still not available to Members. I hope that the matter will be looked into.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for raising that point of order. There is no rule of the House that says what time such statements should appear. Perhaps it would be appropriate for him to take up this matter through the usual channels.

3.42 pm

Mr. Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras): I am sorry that the Secretary of State has had to leave. As he knows, I go around supporting the Government and their health policies behind his back. As I am going to criticise them today, I thought that I should do so to his face—or rather, because of the layout of this place, to the back of his head—but unfortunately that is not possible.

When I first heard of the proposal for foundation hospitals, they sounded to me like a bad idea, and the more I have thought about them, the more I have concluded that they are. I believe that, as currently proposed, they would inevitably lead to a two-tier health service, with some hospitals getting better and better at the expense of others that were getting worse and worse. The proposal does not address the most serious problem faced by patients; indeed, it makes matters worse.

Some NHS hospitals are doing a very good job, some need lesser or greater amounts of improvement, and others are doing really badly. Surely the priority must be to bring the worst up to the standard of the best, and until now that is what the Government have tried to do. They have introduced national standards of treatment for cancer, heart disease, diabetes, the mentally ill and the elderly, they have set up the Commission for Health Improvement to check on standards and give advice on improvements, and they have established the National Institute for Clinical Excellence to try to tackle the problem of postcode prescribing. All those measures were introduced with the opposition of the Conservatives, but with the support of the professionals involved, across the board.

However, foundation hospitals as currently proposed will not be introduced across the board. The 12 best performing hospitals will be singled out for privileged treatment. They will be allowed to borrow money, both from the City and from the Exchequer, and also to keep the total takings from land sales. They are also promised relief from Government interference through the earmarking of funds. Consequently, they will have more money and be better off. They will be able to attract scarce professional staff from neighbouring hospitals by offering better pay, better working conditions and newer equipment—so they will be doing better at the expense of the rest.

The situation is probably best summarised in St. Matthew's gospel, chapter 25 verse 29:

"For unto every one that hath shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but from him that hath not shall be taken away even that which he hath."

I doubt whether those who drafted the Authorised Version of the Bible realised that they were introducing the motto for our foundation hospitals.

The question is: why should the best hospitals be singled out for special and advantageous treatment? If Government interference hinders improvement, why not stop interfering with all hospitals? The argument appears to be that the best hospitals should be rewarded for their performance, but that betrays an obsession with institutions rather than patients. We have only to ask one question to expose the irrationality of the proposal for foundation hospitals: which patients are getting the worst deal, and how do we get them a better one? We know that those who are getting the worst deal are those who have to rely on the worst run hospitals. We also know that they will benefit only if we can narrow the gap between the performance of their hospitals and that of the best hospitals, by levelling up performance. Foundation hospitals will achieve the reverse.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Tyneside, North (Mr. Byers)—I am glad to see him here—talked about consensus. Until now, we have had a consensus on the national health service—just about—and it has been a Labour consensus. However, we are now in danger of setting out to establish a consensus that is basically Tory.

I cannot see how the current proposals will lead to anything other than a two-tier national health service, with one group of hospitals permanently doing better than the other. Moreover, hospitals will have to start competing again. We said that we would abolish competition between hospitals, and we did—but apparently, we are bringing it back: we are re-introducing the internal market. Indeed, we may be introducing something a bit beyond that. If such hospitals borrow, and their income from the trusts that commission their services is not enough to meet their outgoings on borrowing—all borrowing involves paying interest and, eventually, repaying the principal—they will be increasingly tempted to look for private patients. Instead of advertising for doctors from abroad, perhaps some will end up advertising for patients from abroad, to make up any shortfall in funds.

This whole idea springs from certain Government advisers' obsession with the concepts of choice and diversity. People like them may want such choice, but I doubt whether most people do. I doubt whether people in Bristol want to choose to go to Gloucester to benefit from a foundation hospital, or whether people in Leicester want to choose to go to Nottingham for the same benefit. What such people want is prompt first-class treatment and care close to home, at their local hospital—but their local hospitals might lose talented staff to foundation hospitals in Gloucester and Nottingham.

The proposals are likely to widen inequalities between hospitals, and inequalities in health. For example, land values in London and the south-east are much higher than in the rest of the country. If a foundation hospital in the south-east decides to sell off some of its property, it will be able to keep all that money, which will prove a great advantage. That money will no longer be spread across the country. Since 1997, £1.6 billion has gone into the NHS from the sale of property, but it has been shared out throughout the country. Members who

represent midlands or northern seats should watch out: some of the money that used to go to their areas will no longer do so if there are many foundation hospitals in the south-east.

Very recently we have heard the proposal that there should be elected boards. Apparently they are not to be elected by the whole registered electorate of an area, but by a self-selected group of people. I am not sure whether those people will be residents or patients—but patients of which hospital? I was talking to my wife about that this morning. We worked out that during the years when our children were still at home, we had made use of University College hospital, the Elizabeth Garrett Anderson hospital for women, Great Ormond Street hospital for children, Barts hospital, Moorfields eye hospital, St. Mary's hospital and the Royal Free hospital. Will we have a vote in all of them? There is no answer to that. The proposal has not been thought out.

If that electorate is to choose itself, it could be subject to manipulation, or something that some of us in the Labour party have a long history of resisting—infiltration. As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State pointed out in another context, there is always the problem of what Tawney described as the "sharp elbows" of the middle classes. It seems to me that their sharp elbows will get the middle classes on to those electoral rolls, and other people will not be there. If there are to be elected boards, they should cover everyone in every part of the country.

Finally, there seems to be a complete lack of logic in the Government's proposition. If the present arrangements are fundamentally unsound, how did the best hospitals get to be as good as they are, and why are the Government saying that non-foundation hospitals will have to continue to operate under those unsound and flawed arrangements in order to improve themselves? If it is true that the structure is fundamentally unsound, as the Government say, there would be no possibility of improvement under that system for the hospitals that need it.

I do not believe that the Government really have faith in the foundation hospital idea. If they did, they would choose 12 places at random to see whether the proposal would work not only in hospitals that have been well run, but in those that have been moderately run and those that have been badly run. I do not think that the proposal will work. It will be divisive, and I shall do my level best to oppose it at every stage.

3.53 pm

Virginia Bottomley (South-West Surrey): Now we understand why the Secretary of State had such a pressing prior engagement this afternoon. I greatly appreciate the opportunity to speak in this debate as, in part, it identifies the Government's priorities. There were many omissions from the Queen's Speech, which worry many of my constituents and my colleagues—most notably, the whole issue of pensions.

There is rising panic about people's security in old age. In their first flush, the Government rushed in and raided pension funds to the tune of £5 billion. The right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field), my first boss, was appointed to think the unthinkable, but he has disappeared from the Government and we have heard all too little about that. When all are united in the view that one of the greatest priorities is protection and safety for people in their later years, it is extraordinary that there is such silence on the subject.

The fact that there was no mention of a civil service Bill is a serious error. I was disappointed that the right hon. Member for Tyneside, North (Mr. Byers) did not refer to that issue. I am sorry that I am making that point in his absence from the Chamber, because I welcome him back to speaking in the House. The Government have found it particularly difficult to resolve questions about the boundaries between political engagement and the role of a public servant.

I commend the Public Administration Committee, whose work on the public service ethos is extremely important. I remind the House that my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition made an excellent speech yesterday—and my hon. Friend the Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) made an excellent speech today. The three of us have a shared background: we have spent most of our lives working in the public sector. That contrasts sharply with the majority of Labour Members who have contributed to the debate.

Those of us who care so much about the public service and its traditions are worried about what is happening to the civil service—the public service—and the degree to which there is a real erosion of its values and principles, so it is disappointing that the Government could not find time to introduce a civil service Bill, especially as the distinguished outgoing Cabinet Secretary, Sir Richard Wilson, made it clear in some of his valedictory speeches that the time had come to do so.

That point is closely related to the issues that we are discussing today. The challenge for public services is not about policies; it is about delivery, leadership and management. There is confusion at the heart of the Government about the nature of leadership in a public service for which, inevitably and rightly, there is political accountability.

I ask hon. Members to make a contrast with the way in which the BBC is managed. Nobody thinks that Greg Dyke's speeches are written for him by the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport. The clarity of his role and his relationship with the people who work for the BBC contrast sharply with the problems faced by people in other parts of the public sector. We have heard far too many accounts of bullying, intimidation, blame culture, micro-managing and too many targets. Those are serious issues in the public sector, especially the health service, at present.

Health service managers are among the best public servants whom I have come across. Indeed, I should have declared an interest earlier, as I currently spend a lot of time in executive search, especially in the not-for-profit sector. Few charities would not give their eye-teeth for someone who had been an NHS manager to lead them, yet in the health service and in this place those managers all too rarely receive the praise and recognition that they deserve. When we get to the point where health service managers are found to have been fiddling the figures to please their political masters, everyone in the NHS and Parliament should take that very seriously indeed.

I welcome many of the initiatives that have been introduced. The extra money is an opportunity that the health service should seize with open arms. The national

[Virginia Bottomley]

service frameworks and, after attempts at modification and improvement, some of the agencies and commissions for health audit and inspection, are making an important new contribution.

At the same time, however, it is important to let go and to trust the people who are leading the service. For that reason, I entirely disagree with the right hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson). I do not doubt his commitment and I am sure that he does not doubt mine, but we see public sector leadership and management in a very different light.

I commend to the House Onora O'Neill's Reith lectures. She talked at length about what is happening in the public service, and about the appalling problems created by ever more targets, ever more micro-management and ever more audit. Since the Government came to power there have been 8,000 targets; the NHS plan alone introduced 400 targets.

The Government were criticised—gently—by Lord Simon of Highbury, who pointed out that Ministers have muddled ideas about accountability and responsibility and that politicians now see themselves not only as accountable for defining the overall direction and main objectives, but also as providing the services. He said:

"Ministers and civil servants should not, and cannot, be responsible for producing the desired outcomes. That is the job of managers of those services".

To quote Onora O'Neill:

"For those of us in the public sector the new accountability takes the form of detailed control. An unending stream of new legislation and regulation, memoranda and instructions, guidance and advice floods into public sector institutions. Many . . . will have looked into the vast database of documents in the Department of Health website, with a mixture of despair and disbelief. Central planning may have failed in the former Soviet Union but it is alive and well in Britain today. The new accountability culture aims at ever more perfect administrative control of institutional and professional life."

She then went on to say how that is undermining professional satisfaction and commitment, and that it has become a distraction from the work that needs to be done.

We have heard a series of such comments. Charles Leadbetter, in the Demos pamphlet, talked of the centralised, micro-targeted approach. Will Hutton has also been making some important points—I hope that the Government will listen to him—about the plethora of institutions at the centre within the health service. There is the modernisation agency and there are different teams within the Government, such as the delivery unit. There is an endless brain drain up the service to the centre, instead of down into delivery on the front line. The perception remains that those who can, think. Time and again, career progression hinges on managing upwards rather than motivating and managing staff to deliver more efficient, high quality services. Plum jobs in the civil service remain in the private offices, and in the policy-making units in No. 10, the Cabinet Office, the Treasury and the Foreign Office.

We should welcome the opportunity offered by the move to foundation hospitals and see it as a move for the delivery of quality public services not only here but throughout the world. One of the frustrations of coming out of government was hearing the right hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras blaming public officials or, more likely, blaming those benighted Tory Ministers who had "led the country to rack and ruin" for the past 18 years, only to be asked to visit countries that were emulating examples of the new style of public service management. I am pleased that with primary care trusts and foundation hospitals we are returning to that example. It would be better if members of the Government had the generosity of spirit to recognise the origin of some of their ideas. I do not expect them to be nice to members of the previous Government, but they could have greater generosity of spirit towards people in the service. Ministers getting the credit every time something goes right and officials getting the blame every time something goes wrong is not the way to bring out the best in people.

Mr. Dobson: Can the right hon. Lady give a single example of my blaming any health service official when I was Secretary of State for Health? I cannot think of one.

Virginia Bottomley: It may have been after the right hon. Gentleman's time, but when the chief executive of the Bedford trust was fired, it caused a great ripple throughout the service. If he really wants to debate the matter here, I can inform him that many people in the service—including many of his political persuasion—felt that his treatment of Sir Colin Walker was extremely harsh because his ethos and values in the Cambridgeshire and East Anglia area reflected the NHS values of equity, efficiency, access and innovation.

Mr. Dobson: The right hon. Lady seems to forget that those on the Conservative Front Bench welcomed my decision to sack Sir Colin Walker, because he was doing a bad job.

Virginia Bottomley: I think that the right hon. Gentleman knows that one reason why I am leaving party politics is that I am less concerned about going backwards and forwards across the House in this vein; I would rather say what I want to say about the delivery of public services and the improvements that can be made in the national health service at a critical time.

A further omission from the Queen's Speech that is a great disappointment to many people is that of the mental health Bill, which the Secretary of State mentioned today. His failure to mention that Bill to the Queen is extraordinary, given that he managed to slip it out today. My constituents are bemused by the priorities—how we can apparently find more time to bring to a conclusion the question of hunting with dogs when we cannot find time for other legislation is beyond me.

My constituents would feel that I had failed them if I did not remind the House that 125 people are now waiting more than a year for treatment in west Surrey. They would feel that I had failed them if I did not say that another five criminal justice measures will not help with problems in Surrey and the home counties, where we have to lose even more police.

The Secretary of State constantly points to equality of outcome. There is a growing inequality of service, whether in social services, policing or the health service.

We should welcome the opportunities that foundation trusts will provide to allow greater flexibility in pay and greater responsiveness to local people. I only hope that the Government will think carefully before they encourage the election of trust governors. Sir Cyril Chantler and many others have talked of trusts becoming more like universities. If governors are to be elected, it may bring a whole different agenda to their leadership and management. People are reluctant to become involved in elections at present. I fear that many of the most distinguished trust and health authority chairmen, as well as many chancellors of universities, will not be prepared to stand for election. I welcome the trusts, but I hope that hon. Members will think carefully about their governance.

4.6 pm

James Purnell (Stalybridge and Hyde): Pensions are often a dangerous subject. One of our colleagues spoke to members of Age Concern recently and told them that pensions was an important subject because they did not have much time left. After that, the audience gave him a rather hard time.

The cruel irony of the health inequality figures is that my constituents in the north-west literally have less time to live than people in other parts of the country. Life expectancy in the north-west is about five years lower than the average in the rest of the country. Indeed, *The Guardian* reported this week that Manchester is the most dangerous place in Britain to live.

It goes without saying that the national health service is one of the great creations of any Government in this country. Since the 1950s when it was created, however, health has not improved in the north-west according to many indicators. One reason is that we have spent much more money on acute services and hospitals than on primary care. Recently, I met primary care workers from my constituency and I was extremely impressed by their dedication and professionalism. They pointed out that until we have a big shift in resources from curing problems to preventing them, we will not be able to deal with health inequality. I hope that we will see more attention paid to that in these reforms of the health service.

We will be able to tackle health inequality only if we have a health funding formula that reflects the problems. At the moment, the formula does not reflect deprivation or health problems. I was encouraged to hear the Secretary of State say that the new formula will take that into account when it is published and I look forward to that being the case.

Unlike my right hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson), I support foundation hospitals, and I make no apology for that. It is a deception to say that we have had only one tier of hospitals. There has been a great variation in the performance of different institutions. If we can have a mechanism that will encourage institutions to aspire to foundation hospital status, it may lift average performance throughout the service and everyone will benefit. Foundation hospitals could also be an engine for innovation, allowing things to be pioneered that are not possible in the rest of the service, which could then spread to the rest of the NHS. I would certainly welcome that.

The health service alone cannot tackle health inequality, which is caused by poverty, poor housing and basic lack of information on parenting and nutritional skills, among other reasons. My right hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) has done some interesting research showing that many health and educational problems can be predicted by looking at children's birth weight and focusing on those whose weight at birth is significantly lower than average. I therefore find it incredible that Conservative Members seem to be saying that they will not support sure start—I give them the opportunity now to deny that. Sure start is aimed exactly at that problem of inequality—it gives people early parenting advice, as well as nutritional and health advice that can address that very fundamental inequality of opportunity. I am not surprised that no one from the Conservative party has stood up to deny that principle. As on so many other issues, their problem is not so much disunity as having made the wrong judgment on major policy issues.

The hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) refused to say that he would match our spending commitments. Yet again, his defence was that he was not writing the health budget now. However, the Conservatives have already written their budget for defence spending; they have said that they will match the Government's spending. If they cannot say the same for health, the suspicion is that they have a hidden agenda of cuts.

It is not surprising that the Conservatives have fallen back on the tired idea of encouraging people to opt into the private sector. That is a counsel of despair. They have decided that as they will never be convincing on public services, all they can do is give a very few—the richer few—the ability to opt out of the NHS and go into the private sector. In that way, they are giving up on the right goal of improving public services in general.

The Conservatives have the same problem regarding spending on pensions. Since the last election, we have spent more on helping pensioners than it would have cost to restore the earnings link. We will continue to do so through the pension credit, which was supported by the Conservative members of the Select Committee on Work and Pensions and also by Lord Fowler. I am not sure whether the Conservative Members who are here will support that.

Mr. Goodman: Will the hon. Gentleman acknowledge that the Select Committee report was critical of the pension credit in some, though not all, respects, especially with reference to take-up rates, to which I will be referring later?

James Purnell: The hon. Gentleman has a good record of campaigning on these issues. He will know that the Committee welcomed the principle of the pension credit. It made some comments but they were, in my view, mainly on the implementation and the detail of the policy.

It is quite right that the pension credit is being introduced, because it is targeting the first major problem in pensions—the poverty of current pensioners. The second major problem is that workers are not saving enough, and I want to float an idea for dealing with that.

There is a growing consensus among some people that we should raise the retirement age to 70 to fund a much higher universal state pension. I do not share that view.

[James Purnell]

The recent YouGov poll showed that about two thirds of people were opposed to raising the state pension age. We must ask ourselves why. It may be all very well for people in sedentary occupations, like ourselves, to work beyond the age of 65, but it is the exception for those in manual occupations to work beyond the age of 60, and many do not work after 55. It would be difficult to persuade them that it was reasonable to wait another five years before they get their state pension. Nor am I attracted to the idea of compulsion. It is illiberal and poorer people would end up saving money towards a pension when they would be better off using it to spend on consumption today.

I should like to suggest a third way, if I dare call it that, between those two options—that of introducing a presumption to save. As in many 401(k) systems in America, we would have an automatic opt-in. People would automatically be included in a second tier of private saving. We would deduct from their salary a proportion of their income; that would be invested in private pension funds, which would be chosen and regulated as they are in Sweden by an independent pensions agency. Because of the size of those funds and because their recruitment and advertising costs would be low as they would attract members automatically, the pensions could operate with very low charges. In Sweden, they expect charges to be somewhere between $25 and $40 a year. That is significantly lower even than the current limit in stakeholder pensions.

Under that system, people would have a proportion of their salary deducted to put into saving for a pension. That money would go into safe investments which would be regulated and weighted towards low-risk investments, with low charges. If they wanted, people could opt out completely. If they wanted to spend the money on current consumption or to save in a riskier pensions vehicle, they could do so. It would not be a tax. We would be using the basic problem with the current pension system—inertia. People do not get round to saving, they are put off by charges and the choice on offer. Basically, they never send off the forms. Instead of inertia creating a problem, it will help to solve the pensions problem.

In the United States where this system has been tried, the evidence suggests that between 85 per cent. and 95 per cent. of people stay in the pension scheme to which they are automatically allocated. The evidence also shows that the policy is effective at reaching those groups that currently save less than they need to for a good income in retirement—women, part-timers, people from ethnic minorities and those in lower paid occupations. The system would be well targeted at the current policy problem—the lower and middle income earners who are not saving enough. It would not have the problem of illiberality, which compulsion does and because people would be saving from day one of their working life, it would reduce the need to raise the retirement age.

As the Government approach their Green Paper proposals, if they reject compulsion and raising the retirement age, people may be waiting for a big idea that will respond to the scale of the perceived problem in pensions. I think that introducing a presumption to save would be an effective way of targeting the real pensions problem of people not saving enough. I commend it to the House, and I commend the Queen's Speech to the House.

4.17 pm

Mr. Peter Lilley (Hitchin and Harpenden): We have had some interesting, constructive and distinguished speeches in this debate, not least from my right hon. Friend the Member for South-West Surrey (Virginia Bottomley) and her counterpart, the right hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson). I have to say, however, that of the 20 or so Queen's Speeches that I have heard in my time in Parliament, the speech made by the Prime Minister in introducing and defending the programme in the Gracious Speech was probably the worst—the thinnest, the least substantial and the one which contained the least attempt to justify any of the measures in the programme. At first, I wondered why that was so. I think that it is because the Prime Minister sees those measures essentially as pegs on which a headline can be hung by the complacent elements of our media, rather than as substantive measures to make real changes to the governance of this country.

I want to begin by speaking about health—rather rashly, perhaps, given that two former Secretaries of State for Health have already spoken. I spelled out in a recent ten-minute Bill speech, and previously in a Demos pamphlet, my views on the need to restore patient choice in the health service. Choice is the dynamic force which drives improvements in quality and efficiency when it is allowed to operate and people are given a choice between different suppliers. Unfortunately, choice within the NHS was abolished by the Government in 1999 by circular 117. We no longer have the right to choose a hospital other than that to which our local health authority, or health bureaucracy, is contracted to send us. We cannot choose to go to one with a shorter waiting time, with better outcomes, for a particular operation, or to one which is known to be cleaner or is more convenient for any reason.

When I put forward my proposals for restoring choice, they were, sadly, derided, by the present Front-Bench health team. They said that to restore choice in the health service would mean individuals running all over the country looking for better care or shorter waiting times. That is a bit rich, coming from a Government who subsequently have sent people running all over the Mediterranean on the same search. But today the Secretary of State invoked the language of choice and diversity of provision. Have the Government changed? Have they been converted? If so, no one would be more joyful than me. There is more joy in heaven—and in Hitchin and Harpenden—over the conversion of one sinner who repenteth than over 99 of my colleagues who need no repentance.

Dr. Tonge: I am a little puzzled, because I seem to remember that when the right hon. Gentleman's party ran the health service, although there was an internal market, the patient followed the money in the form of a contract from the health authority and had very little choice, except in the occasional extra-contractual referrals.

Mr. Lilley: Unlike the hon. Lady, I do not think that everything my party did was right and that we cannot

learn from experience. I spelled out in my speech and pamphlet both the ways in which I thought that some of the changes that we introduced had unforeseen consequences which we did not approve of, and the improvements which should be made in future. I hope she will give credit for that rather than make silly, knocking points about the past.

I am not sure that the Government have substantively changed their policy on this issue, certainly not as much as I would hope. To harness the dynamo of choice within the NHS would need four things. First, there is the need to restore the right of patients to choose which hospital they are treated at. Sadly, there is no proposal to repeal circular 117. Secondly, we need to give patients information about waiting times, hospital outcomes, cleanliness and so on. There was no mention of that in the Secretary of State's speech. Thirdly, we have to make money follow the choice. Again, there is no reference to that in the financing mechanisms for new foundation hospitals or otherwise. Fourthly, we have to make hospitals genuinely independent. There was reference to greater independence for hospitals in the Queen's Speech and the Secretary of State's speech, but it seemed to be an element of typical new Labour tokenism rather than the mark of substantive change.

The Secretary of State spoke only about new control mechanisms and new accountability at democratic local level in addition to centralised control. There was nothing about greater freedom or replacing centralised control by local control. He said nothing about removing the application of the several hundred targets. My local hospitals have 248 targets applying to them. Are they to apply to foundation hospitals? The Prime Minister strongly defended the use of targets, so I must suppose they are. There was no indication of whether the ring-fencing of funds by Ministers for certain applications is to apply to local trusts. There is no indication whether the star-rating system is to apply to foundation hospitals.

It looks as though the Government are talking essentially about a change in local democratic representation on hospital boards, to which I have no objection—indeed, I am rather sympathetic to it, although I appreciate that there are enormous difficulties in working out where the electorate lies—but not about any serious independence for NHS hospitals.

In practice, we observe that the Government are in the business not of widening choice and diversity for patients but of narrowing it. Throughout the country, they are busy closing and merging hospitals. They always claim that such decisions are medically driven. Theoretical arguments exist that bigger hospitals may in certain circumstances provide better standards of care, but where is the practical evidence that those mergers and closures work and produce improved outcomes for patients?

I have repeatedly asked Ministers to carry out such studies. Indeed, there is a Minister on the Front Bench now whom I have previously asked and who has previously refused to give us that evidence or to commission research that would provide evidence of whether or not mergers which have taken place have worked. In Hertfordshire, we saw the merger some years ago—the hon. Member for St. Albans (Mr. Pollard) will remember it—of the accident and emergency and acute services of St. Albans with those of Hemel Hempstead. Although I have asked for evidence repeatedly year after year, no evidence has ever been provided that a merger has resulted in the improvements in medical care that every consultant who advocated that merger said it would bring about. Now we are seeing more proposals for mergers and centralisation, including the closure of what remains of St. Albans hospital. We should have the evidence first, before we see any further mergers and closures.

I want to see a new teaching hospital in Hertfordshire, but not as an excuse or a way of dressing up the centralisation of existing capacity in one place. We are told that the proposal for a new hospital will simply siphon off capacity from existing hospitals and result in no extra beds.

In practical terms the Government are talking about choice, but they are reducing choice. They are talking about decentralisation but they are taking decisions centrally. In substance, there is still the bureaucratic centralism which the right hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras clearly still believes in and at least has the integrity and honesty to defend.

I welcome the constructive and interesting speech on pensions from the hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (James Purnell). Pensions are in crisis, yet there is nothing in the Government's programme to deal with that. The Government ignore this issue at their peril. In my time in Parliament, the largest single postbag I have ever had was when it was rumoured that the Government were going to change the taxation treatment of pensions. It was larger than that received on any other subject in my 20 years here. People now are concerned because they are seeing the damage done already by the £5 billion tax change imposed on pension funds.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff, West): Did the right hon. Gentleman have a large postbag at the time of the Tories' mis-selling of pensions scandal?

Mr. Lilley: No I did not. That was partly because the regulator ensured and guaranteed that no one would lose from that scandal. I had a large postbag at the time of the Maxwell scandal when the hon. Gentleman's former colleague stole £500 million from the pension funds—a feat only ever exceeded by the Chancellor of the Exchequer, who steals 10 times that amount every year from current pension funds with his Robert Maxwell memorial tax.

We are told that the reason why the Government are not proceeding with any relevant measures is that they are looking for a consensus. That is usually a symptom of indecision or an attempt to silence criticism. Although many people think that our adversarial mode of parliamentary government leads an incoming Government to uproot everything that has gone before, that rarely happens. It has never happened with pensions. Governments have always built on the measures introduced by their predecessors rather than reversing them. Therefore, the Government do not have a need for a prolonged royal commission to achieve consensus. They should go ahead and act now to improve the current situation. They can be sure that an incoming Conservative Government will build on that rather than simply uproot any new measures that the

[Mr. Lilley]

Labour Government introduce. It will be our duty, however, to criticise the proposals that they put forward and that, I am sure, we will do in a constructive spirit.

4.29 pm

Ross Cranston (Dudley, North): I had intended to contribute yesterday, but I fell off the end at 10 o'clock last night. I apologise to the respective Front-Bench spokesmen for the fact that because I did not anticipate being here today as well as yesterday, I will not be able to stay for the winding-up speeches.

I want to talk about the philosophical underpinning of important measures in the Queen's Speech. Because of the subject matter of today's debate, I shall illustrate that with references to the health service.

As has been the case for the past six years, the programme set out in the Queen's Speech continues a commitment to social justice. The objective is a more equal, inclusive society, where marginalisation is reduced and the vulnerable are cared for but where citizens have duties and responsibilities as well as rights and opportunities. Crucially, the programme continues to reflect the belief that Government intervention—notably, but not exclusively, in the form of public services such as the NHS—is necessary to achieve that objective.

Social justice and equality remain critical concerns because inequalities still exist in our society between socioeconomic groups, ethnic groups and regions, and along a range of dimensions that include income and wealth, educational opportunities and health. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State mentioned the recent Office for National Statistics figures on health, and an independent inquiry into inequalities in health was chaired by Sir Donald Acheson. As a result of that inquiry, the Government last year announced two targets. The first target was to reduce the differences in mortality rates between manual groups and the population as a whole, and the second was to reduce differences in life expectancy between people in different geographical areas.

At its simplest, our reaction against such inequalities originates in the belief that it is unfair for people who cannot be held responsible for their poverty, physical disability, state of health and so on to be disadvantaged. The equality that we pursue is quite straightforward in some areas. An example is equality before the law, or when people are treated as being of equal worth. In other areas, we are dealing with equality of opportunity. However, there are circumstances in which it is not sufficient for everyone to be at the same starting post despite having different handicaps.

In yet other areas—such as protection against crime and access to good health care—equality has more to do with outcomes. However, it is important to stress that equality is not the same as uniformity, and that it is not always equality of outcome. Moreover, equality is not inconsistent with difference, or with the pursuit of and rewarding of excellence.

In his great lectures of 1929, which were later published in his book "Equality", R.H. Tawney made that much clear. He was passionate about achieving a more equal society, but he spoke about the need to respect excellence. He deprecated mediocrity. He argued that progress depended on the recognition of the outstanding, although he had contempt for unfounded pretences to it. There needs to be a balance between recognising difference and excellence on the one hand, and the pursuit of a fairer society on the other. It is against that background that we can better appreciate proposals such as the foundation hospital idea.

I shall turn from those philosophical underpinnings to deal with three themes that run through the Queen's Speech. The first theme is the economy. It is not surprising that the Queen's Speech should begin by setting economic stability as one of the Government's three main priorities. My right hon. Friend the Chancellor has delivered that stability, with inflation, interest rates and public debt all low. That economic success feeds through to higher employment, and to welfare assistance such as tax credits. Importantly for this debate, it has also fed through to the huge additional investment that has been made in the health service.

The second theme of the Queen's Speech is public services. We must invest in public services, but we must also refurbish them to ensure greater flexibility and transparency and greater responsiveness to the needs of consumers and patients. Public services have long had a role in ameliorating inequality. At one point in his lectures, Tawney says that the standard of life of the great mass of the community depends not simply on income from work but on the social income that people receive as citizens. As I have said, public services have to be financially viable. One of the challenges is to provide first-class public services that are affordable.

Another challenge is universality, which allows everyone in society to benefit, for example, from good health. One problem in redressing inequalities in service provision is that there is a burden of the past. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State mentioned that, and the primary care trust in my area faces an immediate financial strain in meeting need because services have historically been skewed to other, wealthier parts of the borough.

Public service reform has to be at the core of the Government's agenda if the health service and other public services are to deliver a service that responds to individual need. One aspect of reform is countering the conservatism of bureaucracy. Not surprisingly, producers of a service are attached to the comfortable ways of doing things, even if that is not in the interests of the consumers of that service.

A second aspect of reform is the need to overcome the natural tendency of bureaucracies to operate as silos. There has been some discussion today about the need for health authorities and social services to deal better with the problem of delayed discharges. A third aspect is possibly the most important, and it involves liberating from the dead hand of bureaucracy the innovative health official or institution. Obviously, that entails consumers of public services—in the NHS, that means patients—having a larger say.

I have no philosophical objections to high-performing hospitals becoming foundation hospitals, as long as equality of access to good quality services is continued and the ethic of public service is maintained. We cannot go back to having a postcode lottery for

public services. There is a need for high minimum standards around the country, enforced by targets and inspection. I particularly welcome the establishment of the commission for social care inspection anticipated in the Bill on health and social care reform.

However, I repeat that people who think that uniformity in the NHS is possible or even desirable are missing three factors. The first has to do with practicalities: it is simply not possible to control tightly from the centre an organisation as vast as the NHS, which in terms of size is a rival to the Chinese army or the Indian railways.

The second factor involves the health inequalities that I mentioned earlier. Unequal treatment is needed to address those inequalities. Thirdly, and as Tawney recognised, there is no philosophical inconsistency between social justice and the rewarding of excellence.

The third theme of the Queen's Speech involves responsibilities. Social justice confers rights and opportunities, but also imposes on citizens duties and responsibilities. In that respect, there has been an historical failing in our thinking. People such as Tawney recognised that rights involved duties, and they spelled out the implications for people with power and privilege, but they did not deal with the implications for people who benefited in a more equal society.

One area identified in the Queen's Speech where responsibilities are crucial is the welfare state. People have the responsibility to work if they can, and the responsibility not to defraud the system. Responsibility has links with social justice. On the one hand, we must make sure that people get a fair return and, on the other hand, we must deny rewards to those who cheat.

The notion that citizens have responsibilities is most evident in those parts of the Queen's Speech that deal with criminal justice, but the notion also has an application in the context of the health service. Patients have responsibilities— in simple matters such as turning up for appointments, for instance, and in more important matters such as access to particular services.

The three themes are linked. We need a sound and growing economy to fund the health service and other public services. In turn, good public services such as the NHS mean that trust in Government, and thus social cohesion, increases. Thirdly, the hope must be that that will generate a greater public-spiritedness and a renewal of civil society that will lead to a more socially just society. I recognise of course that that cannot be achieved by Government alone. It depends on a range of decisions by individuals in their vast network of everyday activities. The measures in the Queen's Speech will make a welcome contribution to social justice.

4.40 pm

Sir Michael Spicer (West Worcestershire): Like the hon. and learned Member for Dudley, North (Ross Cranston), I want to talk about the relationship between the economy and public services, although the hon. and learned Gentleman will forgive me if I come to rather different conclusions from his, if I understood them. I suppose that I am more of a Trevor-Roper man than a Tawney man. Before I forget, Madam Deputy Speaker, I ought to declare an interest as stated in the Register, in case it is necessary, although I do not think that it is relevant.

I do not believe that we can consider health and pensions without reference to the general state of the economy. That is particularly true given that the Government's primary solution, whatever they have said this afternoon, is to throw more money at the problem. The specific issue is the way in which the Government are funding the health service. If the extra money were really being spent on specific, discrete front-line investment projects, that would be one thing. But it is not.

Through a combination of private finance initiative funding, which has long-term expenditure implications, and wage increases, unstoppable spending increases are being set up which will have relatively little impact on the quality of services provided but will make enormous medium and long-term demands on financial resources. In that context, the firemen's dispute is highly relevant. If we assume, despite what the Deputy Prime Minister said this afternoon, that what will finally emerge is a wage increase of approximately 16 per cent. over two years, that would be four times the rate of inflation. The knock-on effect of that on the rest of the public sector will be enormous, and it will be largely the Government's own doing.

The fault has been to leave the impression that, especially in the health service, there are vast public resources slopping about for employees' taking. So enormous public sector pay settlements lie ahead. The question is whether the economy can afford them and how strong the economy is. The Government's answer is that the economy is very strong. We have heard the points made this afternoon. The Government say that we have low unemployment, low inflation, low mortgage rates and high earnings.

However, that is the veneer. Peel off the outer skin and a different picture emerges. Let us begin with Britain's competitiveness, and particularly her ability to pay her way in the world. This has been slipping very fast indeed, as IMD showed last week. According to IMD, Britain has just moved from 13th place in the world to between 16th and 19th. Part of the reason for that is that Britain's employment costs are rising rapidly. Until recently, we had the most competitive labour costs in Europe, but the UK is now superseded only by Germany and France. With the £8 billion in new national insurance rates biting in the new year, the British position will be further greatly weakened in Europe. Europe's position is itself weak compared with competitive areas such as the United States and the far east.

One remedy for high labour costs is high investment. Indeed, that is what sustained the United Kingdom in the mid to late 1990s. Recently, however, low net returns for investment, largely due to rising taxes and regulatory controls, mean that investment rates have collapsed. The effect has been declining rates of productivity. In fact, productivity rates have been weak since Labour took office, but recently they have become so bad that the Government no longer publish them in what is ironically called "Productivity in the UK"—a pamphlet that they produce once a year.

The impact of the decline in the competitiveness of the British economy is already being felt in our balance of payments. In 1997, the current account deficit was £1.7 billion. By 2000, it had risen massively to more than £19 billion and by 2001 it was more than

[Sir Michael Spicer]

£20 billion. No economy can continue to sustain this kind of haemorrhage without matching inflows of capital. Something will have to give. What will go first is the projected growth rate, currently forecast by the Chancellor of the Exchequer at some 2.5 per cent. per annum. That brings me back to public expenditure, especially on health.

The pattern of PFI-related expenditure and irreversible wage increases makes it highly unlikely that public expenditure will slow down as the economy declines. Indeed, the reverse is likely to be the case. So we will have exploding public expenditure and falling growth rates. That can mean only one of two things—rising public borrowing and with it rising interest rates, or rising taxes. As the Adam Smith Institute recently showed, taxes are rising faster in the United Kingdom than anywhere else in Europe.

Tax rises of such magnitude, especially rises in indirect taxes, which the Government have chosen, hit the poorest hardest. They also deter investment and enterprise and so further slow the growth rate. We have the classic socialist vicious circle—high taxes, low growth, higher taxes and lower growth. That is not so much boom and bust as bust and bust. We need the opposite—low taxes, high growth, high revenue take and thus even higher growth. We have in prospect the opposite—higher and higher taxes and lower living standards.

When they rumble the situation, as they probably will when the national insurance tax bites in the new year, the British people are likely to react angrily. In that case, the polls will look very different next year from the picture that they present today.

4.47 pm

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff, West): In welcoming the Queen's Speech, I am pleased to see a Bill designed to meet the needs of the NHS in Wales. It is an example of devolution in action that there seems to be a guaranteed annual slot in the Queen's Speech for legislation specifically for Wales. The National Assembly for Wales does not have primary legislative powers, so it is welcome to see Bills introduced annually in the Queen's Speech.

We have heard some interesting speeches, and I shall focus on pensions. We have heard some thoughtful speeches about pensions—for instance, from the right hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley), although I did not agree with all that he said, and from my hon. Friend the Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (James Purnell). My hon. Friend spoke of the "engine of change", while the right hon. Gentleman referred to the "dynamo of choice". I did wonder whether the dynamo of choice drove the engine of change—

Mr. Pound: Into the lay-by of lost dreams.

Kevin Brennan: My hon. Friend finished the sentence better than I could have.

We look forward to the Green Paper on pensions. They are not a quick-fix subject, although the right hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden seemed to suggest as much. My hon. Friend the Member for Stalybridge and Hyde told me earlier that when Sweden wanted to change the law, it took 14 years to conduct a review. The Government are right to reflect and consult, and to move slowly and deliberately. Those who legislate on pensions in haste repent at leisure—and there might not be much leisure in retirement if the Government get it wrong.

I liked my hon. Friend's proposal—it could be called a third way proposal, which is hardly surprising, given that it came from him—to introduce compulsion with a small "c". People would be automatically registered with a pension scheme, but could opt out and consider alternatives if they thought that that scheme was not in their interests at that time or, indeed, throughout their working lives. There would have to be a proviso: they could not expect the state to pick up the pieces during their retirement if they chose that option.

There is an injustice in pension law, with which I hope the White Paper will deal. I am thinking of what happens to those with occupational pensions whose companies subsequently go into receivership and liquidation. That recently happened to workers at Allied Steel and Wire in Cardiff—and to Allied Steel and Wire workers in Sheerness, but obviously I was particularly interested in what had happened in Cardiff.

Some workers in that company were required, when they joined it or its predecessors—it had had various guises—to join an occupational pension scheme as a condition of their employment. They had no choice. Some have been with the scheme for well over 20 years, and are approaching retirement. They have paid 5 per cent. of their salaries into the scheme throughout that time. The company has made contributions, assuming that it was building a pension at an accrual rate of one sixtieth. It was assumed that those who retired after 30 years with the company—as many would have done—could reasonably expect half their final salaries, and a fair chance of security in retirement.

When the workers signed up to that arrangement—as I said, in some cases it was a condition of employment—they thought that they were signing up to something that would give them security in retirement. They did not think that it was a risky investment; they thought that they would be guaranteed a reasonable pension. What they did not understand, and what I think is little understood by those with occupational pension schemes, is that when companies go into receivership—as, sadly, they do from time to time—and the pension funds are wound up or frozen, their pension-holding employees may lose everything. It turns out that final-salary occupational pensions are not the risk-free, or low-risk, investments that those workers believed them to be, and that some of them might have done better to leave their money in building societies. Pensions should be about security, not risk.

It is bad enough to lose a job, but when those workers lost their jobs they suddenly discovered that, owing to recent sharp downward fluctuations in the stock market, the pension fund had fallen significantly in the last 12 months or so. The company had been meeting its minimum funding requirement, laid down in legislation since the Pensions Act 1995, but there was not enough in the pot to meet the needs of the deferred pensioners—the current workers who are not yet drawing their pensions.

Under current law, those who have made additional voluntary contributions are first in line and existing pensioners second, but the last in the pecking order for anything left in the scheme when a pension fund is wound up when a company goes into receivership are the existing work force. They are often the best and most loyal workers who have stuck with the company for decades and who will not have been laid off or sacked.

In the case of Allied Steel and Wire in Cardiff, the latest information that we hear from some members of the work force—we do not have hard and fast information, because we have not yet seen the interim report by the independent trustee appointed to wind up the pension fund—suggests that some of the deferred pensioners may end up receiving from the occupational pension scheme a pension that amounts to as little as 20 per cent. of what they might have expected from their final salary scheme if the company had not gone into liquidation. It is a jaw-dropping injustice for people to pay into an occupational pension scheme and face that prospect after being loyal workers in a company.

Worse still, under the current system, if such people are concerned about what is happening and write to the independent trustee who is appointed to value the fund, purchase the annuities for existing pensioners and do whatever is necessary to wind it up, he will charge the fund £300 for his reply. In some cases, the independent trustees of smaller occupational pension funds that have been wound up have depleted the bulk of the resources, leaving the workers with nothing. There is no limit on what the trustees can charge for their services. Very few companies engage in such work, so they can charge whatever they like. Their position is the only example I know of one in which the person who is appointed can write their own cheques for as much as they like in return for doing the job. There is every incentive in the system for trustees to prevaricate and drag their heels.

Another injustice is the way in which occupational pension funds are used to provide early redundancies, especially for those in management. In the case of Allied Steel and Wire, two of the company's managers, who had inside knowledge of its financial status, left less than a year before it went into receivership, taking with them a large chunk of the pension fund. Those people, who are in their 50s, are now back in employment, working as consultants in highly paid positions, leaving the workers with nothing.

I had thought that it was shareholders and the banks that lend money to companies that are supposed to bear risks. In this case, however, the people who bear the greatest risk to their livelihood in retirement are the workers. That cannot be right, and I hope that the Government will put it right. The pension fund does not even have secured status when it comes to seeking the money that is to be paid back. That cannot be right and is a fundamental injustice.

I hope that, when the Government publish their Green Paper on pensions, they will consider that issue closely and ensure that what they publish is about security and fairness in retirement for workers, and not insecurity and injustice of the sort that has been suffered by the steelworkers from Cardiff.

4.59 pm

Mr. John Butterfill (Bournemouth, West): The debate on the health service has been interesting. I believe that foundation hospitals are a good idea provided that they are given the opportunity of raising their own money. The proposal to constrain them means that the exercise will not be as good as it might be.

The Government were probably wise to drop the proposal for those with severe personality disorder. The prospect of Members of Parliament legislating to detain compulsorily people with severe personality disorders might be viewed in some quarters as resembling turkeys voting for Christmas.

I want to concentrate on pensions. I am sorry that I missed the speech of the hon. Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (James Purnell). I gather that his contribution was interesting and I shall take care to read it. The hon. Member for Cardiff, West (Kevin Brennan) also made an interesting speech in which he mentioned some subjects to which I shall refer, albeit briefly.

I disagree with the hon. Gentleman that the Government were right to take their time. The pensions problem has existed for a long time. The Government have been in office for five years and they have been much too dilatory in dealing with it. If the health service is in crisis, the pensions system is a disaster. It needed much more urgent attention than it received. The Sandler and Pickering reports have been belatedly published. They should have been produced a long time ago. I look forward to the Green Paper, but I should have preferred to look forward to legislation in this Session.

There are two crises, the first of which is in occupational pension schemes. Why is there a crisis? It is partly due to the regulatory burden on pension providers—that is, employers. That is partly our fault because some of the provisions in the Pensions Act 1995 imposed unnecessary burdens and that needs to be redressed. The crisis is partly due to FRS 17—the new accounting standard—which has drawn to shareholders' attention the true burdens of pensions on companies. However, it is mostly due to lack of funds.

The falling stock market has led to a serious predicament and, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley) said, the Government's advance corporation tax changes are criminal. They bear a huge responsibility for the crisis.

As the hon. Member for Cardiff, West said, there is a severe problem when the schemes get into trouble. That happens for some of the reasons that I outlined. There is not enough money, and the schemes rely on the employer's continuing prosperity to sustain them. When they begin, there is no money, and employees and employers decide that if they stay together for 25 or 30 years, pensions will be provided. However, as the hon. Gentleman said, the hierarchy is wrong. Moneys should be withdrawn from partially completed schemes in proportion to the amount that people paid in, the length of time that they served and the amount that they can reasonably expect to take out. The nearer they get to retirement, the greater the difficulty of finding alternative employment or making up the contributions in another scheme.

The hierarchy should reflect the proximity of the employee to retirement and the amount that has been paid in over the years. An employee who was approaching retirement and had served less time would therefore get less than another who had served longer

[Mr. John Butterfill]

and paid in more. That is logical and fair and I hope that the Government will deal with that when they produce a Bill.

I also hope that the Government accept the need to provide incentives for employers to produce such schemes. Everything that the Government have done so far has proved a disincentive to the schemes. If we are to continue with final salary schemes, which are the best that most people can expect, the Government must reintroduce some form of incentive.

I come now to personal pensions—people's private savings where they do not have a company scheme. Here there has been a terrible loss of confidence among the public, most notably because of the difficulties with Equitable Life, but also many others. Again, the ACT changes and the stock market falls have meant that bonus rates are considerably reduced and people are wondering whether such pension schemes are really a good place for their money.

The other disincentive is the rumours about possible tax changes. The Government do no service to the industry by letting rumours float about that they are about to abolish the tax-free lump sum and higher rate tax relief. All that creates uncertainty in the eyes of those who are saving for their retirement.

There is a huge anomaly in any suggestion about the tax-free lump sum. The tax-free lump sum encourages people, many of whom should not do so, to take the tax-free lump sum to obtain their tax relief. In fact, the Government should be telling many people with smaller pension pots that they should put all their money into the purchase of an annuity, and then perhaps say, to offset the fact that they do not get the tax-free lump sum, that they should have a 25 per cent. reduction in the tax that they will pay on that part of the annuity that they might have taken as a tax-free lump sum. That is what happens elsewhere in Europe.

For example, the Spanish say that an annuity is largely a repayment of capital and only a small amount of it reflects interest earned by that capital. Therefore, they charge people on only 25 per cent. of their annuity; 25 per cent. becomes taxable income and all the rest is tax-free. That happens throughout Europe. Europe has much lower rates of taxation on pensions than on other forms of income.

If the Government want to encourage people to save for themselves, they will have to look at what happens elsewhere in Europe and take such action. The problem with pensions is that they are inflexible and a long-term lock up—30 or 40 years—compared with alternative forms of saving.

The difficulty is that many people prefer an alternative means of saving because they are not prepared to accept such a lock-up and the risks that are inherent in pensions. Many young people today put their money in buy-to-let properties. That has the beneficial effect of increasing the pool of properties available to let, but it also adds to instability in the housing market. A lot of buy-to-let purchases have forced up the price of property and contributed to a huge escalation in property prices. If, as it appears, some of the buy-to-let properties are now proving difficult to let because of over-supply, that may contribute to an artificially steep downturn in property prices. It has induced an element of instability in the property market.

The Government should consider all those aspects and urgently introduce legislation. I hope that once they have the results of the consultation on the Green Paper they will bring legislation to the House with all possible speed.

5.8 pm

Glenda Jackson (Hampstead and Highgate): I endorse the remarks made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson). Not only do I share his dubiety over the creation of foundation hospitals but we share constituency boundaries, we comprise the parliamentary seats within the London borough of Camden and we also share, in a sense, the health facilities that are provided in that part of north-west London, which are not exclusively within the borough of Camden. There is close working with Islington, and the Royal Free hospital in my constituency takes patients from Brent and Haringey and the whole of north-west London.

I shall not reiterate the points made by my right hon. Friend. I am concerned that the creation of foundation hospitals could have a deleterious effect on other hospitals. The hospitals that comprise health provision within my constituency in north-west London already work closely with each other and with other partners both within and without the NHS. I do not believe that the creation of a foundation hospital in the area of London that my right hon. Friend and I represent would necessarily achieve an improvement across the range of treatments for people who require them, whether they live in the area or travel to it every day to work.

I am also concerned about who will be the voters in this particular democratic process. I intervened on my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to ask whether he could give more detail on what comprises localism, and he attempted to allay my fears about who would be the decision makers in the creation of a foundation hospital by pinning his faith on the ballot box. Well, I am no psephologist, but I have read sufficient reviews of general and local elections to know that a great many more Labour votes are required in certain parts of the country to return a Labour representative to the House.

In other parts of the country, a great many more Conservative votes are required to return a Conservative MP to the House. Of course, the Liberal Democrats believe that there will be no genuine representation of the feeling that resides in the country for their party and their policies until there is a complete abdication of the first-past-the-post system, under which people are sent to sit on these green Benches.

Dr. Tonge: Hear, hear.

Glenda Jackson: I share the hon. Lady's view, but that is not the point that I am attempting to make here.

It is not the case that everyone who lives in my constituency and depends on the NHS has the same quality or volume of voice on making decisions about the priorities for health care provision in that constituency. I very much welcome the changes that the

Government have implemented in attempting to make the voice of the patient more pertinent and more directly heard by those who decide health provision, but we still have a long way to go to ensure that everyone has an equal voice. One of my concerns is that the creation of foundation hospitals, far from increasing transparency, openness and—that dread word in this context—choice, will have exactly the opposite effect.

I am concerned about choice because every year it is the big issue in educational provision in my constituency. My constituents who are parents believe that such a choice is in fact a right to the first choice of school for their children as they go into secondary education. All the schools in Camden are extremely good. All the secondary schools are invariably oversubscribed, and they all have waiting lists. That is the one issue that turns up every year when parents discover the truth that they have a choice, but no right, and we must examine it in respect of health care provision.

I can think of individuals and many groups that will campaign vociferously and vigorously for what they perceive to be their choice and, indeed, even their right with regard to health provision. If they win that argument—there is no bottomless pit of money, although I understand that foundation hospitals will be able to borrow—the pursuit of a priority health need by a particular group could have a deleterious effect on people whose health needs may be just as great, but whose ability to phrase their argument, capacity to make it, and access to those who should be listening are limited.

I am somewhat concerned about whose voice is listened to most closely in the still-hierarchical structure of the NHS. I am all for modernisation if it achieves an improvement of our public services, but I do not believe that the voice of a consultant carries equal weight to that of a hospital porter or a hospital cleaner. I am sorry, but I have never yet come across such a situation.

There is also not the same equality of voice when it comes to a patient who may be elderly, who may be chronically alcoholic, who may have certain personality disorders, who invariably smells, or who can be more than a little abusive when receiving care and treatment from hospital staff. I am not arguing that anyone who works in the NHS should put up with abusive treatment, be it physical or verbal, but fortunately our NHS is served by human beings and they can be as selective in their prejudices as in those areas that they wish to support.

If a foundation hospital is created, for example, in the area that I and my right hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras serve in this Parliament, other hospitals that are doing a sterling job and that may have not three stars but two could feel that their contribution had been diminished, demeaned and reduced. Their patients could easily feel that the quality of service that they as users of the NHS will receive there may not be as good as that at a foundation hospital a little further down the road. If funding, up to a point, and the prioritisation of services still depend on what general practitioners tell primary care trusts their patients require, and if patients say, "I do not want to go to hospital A because hospital B is a foundation hospital," despite the arguments that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has advanced, I can see there being a diminution in funds for those hospitals that do not achieve foundation status.

As we all must know, inevitably there would be poaching. We have seen poaching in every area of virtually every industry and business over past years. If foundation hospitals come into being, I have no doubt that managers, boards and the chief executives of hospitals, probably at the behest of their consultants, will attempt to poach individuals.

Dr. Murrison: Does not the hon. Lady agree that her dilemma may be resolved if the Government give us a proper timetable for the rolling out of foundation hospitals? If that timetable were tight, the issues that she is describing would not arise.

Glenda Jackson: I regard the hon. Gentleman's intervention as somewhat flippant. We are talking about major fundamental changes in the provision of health services by the creation of a new tier of hospitals. The Secretary of State pointed out that a much more detailed presentation of what will constitute a foundation hospital will be published, but I have been at some pains to point out that not everyone is as capable—by virtue not of a lack of intelligence but, certainly in my constituency, of not having English as a mother language, for example—of voicing their concerns. If there is going to be genuine consultation on the issue, that consultation must enable everyone who will be affected by the creation of foundation hospitals to voice their opinions. I deeply regret allowing the hon. Gentleman to intervene. *[Interruption.]* I am entitled to voice my opinion. If Conservative Members do not like it, it is their hard luck.

Centrally and essentially, my concerns stem from my perception that foundation hospitals will not present to users of the health service a more open, more transparent service, where they are genuinely in control and truly the drivers of the quality, type and range of health services that they require. I am open to argument. It would be nice if my mind could be changed by what the Government produce for us to view, but at the moment I am deeply suspicious. It seems that the move will create a two or even three-tier NHS. That is not what the NHS should be about. It is certainly not what a Labour party and a Labour Government should be about.

5.19 pm

Mr. John Horam (Orpington): I am very glad to be called before I succumb to deep vein thrombosis, which might result from sitting on these Benches for a prolonged period. That would be particularly unfortunate during a health debate. However, I am sure other hon. Members have similar complaints.

A fortnight ago, the chief executive of my local hospital trust, the Bromley Hospitals NHS trust, held a meeting in response to the concerns of local residents about hospital treatment in the area. This was occasioned by an incident where a disabled and blind 87-year-old man who had had a series of strokes was kept waiting on a trolley for 32 hours in Bromley hospital. He was neglected to the extent that when his daughter arrived to see him on the day he died, he was lying in a

[Mr. John Horam]

pool of his own vomit. It is said that he spent his final hours praying to God for help—he got none from the local hospital. The hospital acknowledged that it had clearly failed in his case.

Although that case is a shocking example of what can happen, in terms of waiting times in accident and emergency it is far from unique. Indeed, at the meeting to which I referred, the chief executive responded sensibly by agreeing to set up a committee of hospital users and relatives to look at cases where hospital care had clearly gone inexcusably wrong. He has also implemented a number of welcome short-term measures to do with accident and emergency. This shows that managers in the health service, of which that chief executive is a fine example, are genuinely very responsive to the problems that they face. The difficulties are certainly no reflection on the staff, who are not only responsive but caring and hard working. The problem is that all too often hospitals are overwhelmed by staff shortages, particularly nurse shortages, and by poor facilities.

Bromley hospital operates on three different sites. Indeed, until a few months ago, Orpington hospital operated in prefabricated buildings that were built during the first world war. However, help is at hand as a new hospital is due to open next April. It is a happy coincidence that I was a Minister in the Department of Health when most of the planning took place, although I give the present Government credit for continuing with the plans and bringing them to fruition. The right hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) was Secretary of State at that time and I give him and the Government due credit for that. As he will be aware, there is one problem, however. The new hospital, which is a PFI hospital, has fewer beds than are now spread over three hospitals. We have already discussed delayed discharges, and as the present hospital has only one star, it is far from being a foundation hospital because of the number of cancelled operations, the readmission rates and the waiting times in accident and emergency to which I have referred. As a consequence, although there might be a shiny new hospital, the circumstances facing local residents may well be worse.

In addition, the plan suggested that the space that patients occupied should be turned into offices for accountants and administrators. As a consequence, I started a campaign, together with a local group, the community care protection group—a dedicated group of women who campaign locally on health issues—to save the beds in the Orpington hospital. Our slogan, not unnaturally, was "Beds not bookkeepers". It was rather obvious, but effective. As a result, we got 11,000 signatures and we were able to go to the primary care trust to present the case for keeping the beds.

Our first suggestion was that the beds be kept for intermediate care because, as health experts will know, there is a severe shortage of care beds and private care facilities. If we are to deal with bed blocking or delayed discharge, some intervening care facility must be available, and here was a hospital with beds in it that could be used for precisely that purpose. To begin with, the PCT was somewhat chary about the suggestion; possibly because it was entirely new and, as a result of the continual reorganisation of the bureaucracy of local health, had been in existence for only a few months and had succeeded another organisation that had lasted only a year. Therefore, the trust felt that it had to hang on and be careful before committing itself to something of that kind.

In the end, the PCT agreed that the beds in Orpington hospital should be kept open—for the purposes, possibly, of intermediate care—for 18 months, which will at least see us through the period until April 2003 when the new hospital is up and running. However, the fact was that it was only an 18-month reprieve, but the Bromley Hospitals NHS trust came forward with a better solution when it applied for inclusion in the Government's programme for diagnostic and treatment centres, a programme that the Government have been rolling out for some time.

Bromley was not in the first tranche but has applied to be in the second tranche, on which decisions have to be taken. I should be grateful if the Under-Secretary would convey to her right hon. and hon. Friends my request that a decision be made on the issue. Is Bromley Hospitals NHS trust to be included in the current tranche for diagnostic and treatment centres in south London? I understand that that is a possibility, and that Guy's is another candidate for the programme. I would like an indication this evening as to whether that decision will be made in the near future. We understood that the decision was to be taken in October; it is now November and we need a decision as soon as possible. In that respect, I pay due regard to the Government's decisions on these matters, which have been helpful.

As the Secretary of State said, investment is not the only issue; there are also the issues of recruitment and reform. I, too, welcome the fact that the Government are climbing out of Labour's long-held views about the need for institutions such as the NHS to be run in a monolithic, state-funded way with heavy trade union organisation. I agree that it is a step forward for Labour to move towards Conservative ideas of greater diversity of supply. That is sensible.

What I fear—and what, I think, the Prime Minister fears—in the light of the opposition we have heard today from the right hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras, and the hon. Members for Hampstead and Highgate (Glenda Jackson) and for Doncaster, North (Mr. Hughes), as well as in coded phrases from the Chancellor of the Exchequer and from trade unionists, is that that opposition will prevent the Prime Minister from going fast enough and on a broad enough basis to bring about the improvements in public services, and particularly health, that we desperately need.

5.29 pm

Mr. Kerry Pollard (St. Albans): The hon. Member for West Worcestershire (Sir Michael Spicer) was complaining about the Tories' poll position. I have some comfort for him: I do not think that they can go much lower. The right hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley) mentioned the downscaling of my hospital in St. Albans and the shutting down of the accident and emergency department some time ago—10 years ago, in fact, when he was the Member for St. Albans as well as a Secretary of State.

I welcome the modernisation of the health service and the freedom that it may give to local hospitals, with devolution of decision making and local accountability.

Our primary care trust is ready to take up that responsibility in the fulness of time. In preparation for this debate, I looked up how much money was given to our local health economy in 1996: just over £400 million. This year the figure is just over £800 million—double that amount. Outputs have not doubled, but some improvements have taken place and more will surely follow.

I visited my local hospital yesterday and went to the day surgery unit, which is very ably run by Sister Eileen Kent. She is willing and able to increase throughput so that more operations are done and there are more good outcomes. I also visited the minor accident and emergency unit that remains. The sister in charge, the consultant, Rita Dunkerley, is also pleased to add more facilities to what she already provides. The will is there among the health professionals, and all they want is the freedom to act.

A theatre and two wards were reopened in the hospital two years ago, and a planning application has been lodged for a new theatre to support the four that are already operating. I am sure that that will help with our waiting lists. There is also a plan to provide some much needed key worker accommodation on the site.

About nine months ago, our special care baby unit at Hemel Hempstead hospital was shut because it proved impossible to recruit staff. I am pleased to report that just yesterday, I received a letter from the chairman of our health authority saying that a midwife-led unit would be opened at the hospital to provide facilities for women expecting a low-risk birth.

We are about to undertake a second review of our acute hospital services—we had one three years ago, and I believe that inappropriate decisions were taken then. I hope that this time, the Secretary of State will make a more robust decision, looking to the longer term. There has been discussion about having a big new hospital, a centre of excellence, in the area. Two sites have been identified, one in Frogmore, in my constituency, and the other at the British Aerospace site in Hatfield. Recently, a third site—the old Harperbury mental hospital site—was suggested by Councillor Malcolm Macmillan. It is a huge site very close to the motorway, and should provide all the land needed for a big new hospital. We need extra capacity, and the new hospital should take care of that.

As the right hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden said, we want a new teaching unit, a medical school, at the university of Hertfordshire. Next week I will meet the vice-chancellor to further that aim.

I am concerned about outcomes, not about who provides the facilities. My wife suffers from debilitating arthritis and is waiting to see a specialist. I hope that she will be off the waiting list very soon, and will start some treatment. My Auntie Pam, who is very dear to me, is recovering from cancer, and I hope that, having had her sixth chemotherapy treatment yesterday, she will continue to recover.

Close to my constituency there is a BUPA hospital. BUPA stands for British United Provident Association—and provident is the right term to describe providing much needed additions to our national health service provision. It is a not-for-profit organisation that provides good services, and we should use it where we can.

Finally, I have a serious matter to draw to the attention of the Front-Bench team. A resident of St. Albans has been waiting 50-plus years for an operation to have his tonsils removed.

Mr. Pound: Fifty years?

Mr. Pollard: Fifty-plus years. My mum took me to Rochdale infirmary 50 years ago to see about having my tonsils out, and I have been waiting ever since. The hospital has since shut down, and I believe that my records have been lost. I have to report to the House that my tonsils are well now, so I am really pleased that I did not have them out. I commend this Queen's Speech.

5.35 pm

Dr. Jenny Tonge (Richmond Park): What the hon. Member for St. Albans (Mr. Pollard) has just said shows what a useless operation a tonsillectomy was in many cases. How good it is that it does not happen quite so often nowadays.

Before I became an MP I spent nearly 33 years in the health service, and I can remember that there has been a minor or major reorganisation every year since 1974. That is why those working in the health service regard it as a bit rich for the Health Secretary to tell them that they must get used to change. There has been change every year for more than 20 years, and another one is not welcome.

It is certainly true that a lot more money has been put into the health service under this Government, and we welcome that, but as the hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) said, unfortunately it has been accompanied by far more bureaucrats. Two thirds of the pages of the *Health Service Journal* are now occupied by advertising, whereas it used to occupy less than a third of the pages. The bureaucrats are setting up so many schemes, and have to employ so many people to fulfil the targets set by the Department of Health, that they are preventing money from reaching the patient. I wish that the Government would take that point on board.

An example of bureaucratic meddling recently occurred in my own area, in Kingston Hospital NHS trust. In August the chief executive was suddenly magicked away. The hospital needed refreshing, we were told, and he went just after the new strategic health authority was formed. He was the first health service manager I have come across in my entire career who was popular with all the hospital staff. They would do anything he wanted them to. The consultants supported him en masse, and the medical director resigned. What a fine decision that was from the top! In some extraordinary way, another chief executive has already been appointed without advertisement or interview. All of a sudden, someone was magicked up to fill that place. Such meddling from the top is absolutely outrageous.

The patients, too, are not very happy. I shall cite just one example. A year ago, a constituent of mine was given an appointment for a bone scan, which was to take place this month. She has just received a letter from St. George's hospital, saying that her bone scan cannot be done this month, and asking her to come back in November 2003. She will have had to wait two years for a routine scan that she needs. Things are not looking good. When I saw the Government's proposal on

[Dr. Jenny Tonge]

foundation hospitals, I must say that I thought it was quite a good idea. There is no question but that hospitals need freeing up; they need to be freed from the bureaucracy that is fed down from the top.

I am glad that I attended this debate because, as some hon. Members have said, it has been excellent. The right hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson), my hon. Friend the Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris) and the hon. Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Glenda Jackson) have made me think hard about this notion, and I should like to pose a few questions for those on the Government Front Bench. I am all in favour of pilot schemes. Let us choose a few foundation hospitals from all ranges—a good one, a middling one and a bad one—as the right hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras suggested. Let us see what happens in 12 months' time, and then spread the idea across the whole NHS, if it proves a good one. However, a two-tier system is a bad idea, for all the reasons that have been given by other hon. Members.

I remain extremely worried about the concept of membership of the proposed mutual organisations. As hon. Members have asked: who will be the members and who will be the voters? The local hospital for my constituency is in Kingston. Other hon. Members have talked about the crossover of patients between primary care trusts, many of which will place their contracts with different hospitals, so who will have ownership of those hospitals? Who will decide who can be members of those mutual societies? How long will it be before a charge is levied on people who want to be members of a hospital and they have to pay a membership fee? If a person is a member and a voter at a particular hospital—as if they were on its electoral roll—will they be able to obtain treatment anywhere they choose, or will they have to stick with that hospital? We need clarification.

Dr. Murrison: I, too, should like clarification. In her opening remarks, the hon. Lady said that there was too much change in the NHS and referred to her 33 years in the service, yet she went on to give a broad welcome to the idea of foundation hospitals. Does she want change or not? Although she is a Liberal Democrat, she cannot have it both ways.

Dr. Tonge: I fully appreciate the hon. Gentleman's comment. However, I was pointing out that people in the health service are thoroughly sick of change because there has been so much meddling. Nevertheless, they would welcome freedom from top-down management; there is no question about that. On this occasion I am speaking on behalf of colleagues and ex-colleagues in the NHS and not for myself or as a Liberal Democrat.

Hon. Members have observed that foundation hospitals in the south-east with a great deal of land would become rich, but that those riches would no longer be shared with the rest of the health service. However, what happens if foundation hospitals are mismanaged and get into debt? Will the Chancellor be happy to pay off those debts? Much more thought needs to go into such considerations.

During my years in the NHS, I served as chair of social services in the London borough of Richmond for five years, so I saw both sides of the divide and the constant buck passing between social services departments and health authorities. Because of my health service days, I have much sympathy with the Government's desire to get patients out of hospital beds quickly. For example, some social services departments make an absolute meal of home care packages and the process goes on for weeks and weeks. It should be speeded up and home care should be carried out by social services if it is within their resources.

Residential care is a big problem in the south-east, especially in south-west London. Local authorities should be given more time and more financial help to manage the movement of patients out of acute beds and into residential care. What happened to intermediate care beds? What happened to the plans for low-tech beds?

I shall not dwell on the mental health Bill. I am delighted that the Government are thinking again. Many changes are needed in mental health services, not least proper funding for the scandalous care in the community scheme, which rapidly became neglect in the neighbourhood. Before the Government even think about reorganising mental health services, however, we need proper funding not only for more psychiatric nurses and social workers in that field, but also for more beds. Everything will depend on their availability.

I am sure that we shall have further opportunities to discuss changes in mental health services, and as I know that other Members want to speak in this debate, I shall conclude my remarks. I do not envy the Government in their task. I know enough about the health service to realise how difficult the problems are. I share some interest in and have some sympathy with what they are trying to do, but they should think again—and hard—before they take the route that they propose.

5.44 pm

Mr. Stephen Pound (Ealing, North): We have heard much that is wise and well informed this afternoon. We have also heard, from the hon. Member for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge), an extraordinary description of the strange goings on in Richmond—a strange part of the world where consultants and chief executives apparently appear, reappear and disappear in a puff of smoke in what is clearly Hogwarts hospital. She described a circumstance that I have never before suspected, although I had often wondered what strange magic in the air made people vote Liberal Democrat.

Dr. Tonge: Given what has happened at Kingston hospital recently, Harry Potter would have been very useful. He would have made a much better job of it.

Mr. Pound: From the hon. Lady's description, I rather suspected that Lord Voldemort was in charge of the hospital.

Talking of evil, my hon. Friend the Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (James Purnell), the golden boy—in fact, the increasingly golden-haired boy—of a future Labour Administration, described foundation hospitals as the dynamo of change driving the engine of choice, or vice versa, using that graphic expression so elegantly enunciated by my good friend the hon. Member for Cardiff, West (Kevin Brennan). I take some issue with my hon. Friend the Member for Stalybridge and Hyde,

as it is not good enough to say that foundation hospitals will enable best practice to spread throughout the national health service. There is nothing to prevent best practice from spreading throughout the NHS now. All one and two-star hospitals should by all means aspire to the higher tier, but I dread the thought of a replication in the health service of the scandal of sink secondary schools. I sincerely hope that that will not happen, and I have confidence that those on the Labour Front Bench will ensure that it does not. However, we have to put a marker down now.

I declare an interest, as the national health service and I were born together, in the first week of July 1948. I know what it is like to be 54 years old, fairly rocky, and in need of modernisation and an urgent cash injection. The important point is that although—as we did not have television in Fulham in those days—I am one of a great many children, my eldest brother, who was born in 1946, died at the age of three months and my next brother, who was born in 1947, also died at that age. I was born in 1948 under the NHS—one of the first children to be born under the NHS—and although it may not please all right hon. and hon. Members, I live in rude good health. I experienced the two-tier health service. I do not want to see it again.

I raised the subject of cross-charging policies between social services and health services with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health earlier. Many hon. Members have touched on that issue. Local authorities in London can be charged up to £120 per night for any patient who is what is colloquially known as bed blocking. Earlier, I mentioned the situation of the London borough of Ealing, where 38 patients who are the responsibility of the borough are still in various hospitals—Ealing, Hammersmith, Central Middlesex and Charing Cross—even though they are fit for medical discharge. That is not because of any idleness or lack of activity or interest on the part of the borough, but because we have lost more than 100 beds in independent nursing homes in the past year. That was caused by house prices in London, and we do not have any control over it.

The local authority faces the prospect of having to transfer £2.2 million to the acute hospitals as a result of something that is beyond its control. Ealing is performing well as a local authority, particularly in social services, but we have a £5.2 million overspend. Social services are demand led. One cannot tell people not to claim. Although there is a virement from central Government, we are still overspent because we have spent above the standard spending assessment. A substantial proportion of that overspend—about £2 million—is entirely due to elderly person placement costs, and cross-charging policies can only exacerbate that situation.

In his response to my earlier question, the Secretary of State referred, quite rightly, to the additional money that is flowing into the national health service. The figure works out to about 6 per cent. of additional funding in 2003–04. The trouble is that the local authorities will not receive these funds until the financial year 2003–04, but they are faced with a £120 per night per patient impost now.

Dr. Murrison *rose—*

Mr. Pound: There was much talk earlier of the Swedish model, but before I move to the Swedish model, I will give way to the hon. Member for Westbury (Dr. Murrison).

Dr. Murrison: Does the hon. Gentleman share my concern that because bed blocking is particularly acute in London and the south, the transfer would actually represent a bed-block tax that would disproportionately affect London and the south of England?

Mr. Pound: I saw the hon. Gentleman stooped in the posture that I assumed to be that of the thinker. Had I but realised that he was crouching like a footpad to ambush me, I might have resisted his intervention. This is not a bed-blocking tax, and it would be absurd to describe it as such. It is a matter to which the Government must give their attention, and I have every confidence that they will.

The annual social services conference in October was honoured by the presence of the Secretary of State for Health, and there was much discussion of the Swedish model. May I point out some of the differences between that model and what we have been discussing today? In Sweden there was a two-year lead-in time before the proposals were implemented. In addition, local authorities had responsibility for a vast range of alternative provision, including direct commissioning of health care. There is very little exposure to the variable pressures of an independent care market—that simply does not happen in Sweden. So there are structural advantages in Sweden, plus the two-year lead-in time.

Sweden also has additional investment in sheltered housing schemes to increase capacity, because this is a capacity issue. Before we start referring to the model that was tried in Sweden, let us consider what else that meant. Bed blocking is ultimately about capacity; it is not about sloth, incompetence, medical malfeasance or local authorities not doing their job. I cannot believe that there is any right hon. or hon. Member in the Chamber tonight who has not dealt with the relatives of elderly people who have lived independently all their lives but suffer a serious medical operation and move to some sort of sheltered accommodation. They do not like this home, they do not like that one. They want the place that is closer to the bus route, near the post office or near the Royal British Legion. It is not simply a matter of placing person A in home B. A delay can often be the result of good practice, not bad practice. As long as there is that constraint of capacity, the time delay will exist and lengthen.

I have confidence in my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Front Bench. I know that they take cognisance of this issue and they have the intelligence to see their way around it. I hope that they will look at the report of the Association of Directors of Social Services. Its members have made a powerful presentation, which I know that the Under-Secretary of State for Health, my hon. Friend the Member for Salford (Ms Blears) has seen. It would

[Mr. Pound]

be churlish of me to say other than that 99 per cent. of the Queen's Speech was excellent, fine and represents a great future for the country. I would just like that one area to be addressed.

5.53 pm

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough): The hon. Member for Ealing, North (Mr. Pound) is an example of someone who can make a speech that contains many serious points, but does not burden it with seriousness. I will leave the philosophy to the hon. and learned Member for Dudley, North (Ross Cranston). The speech of the hon. Member for Ealing, North was the more powerful for containing elements of humour. He is, if I may not quote Dr. Spooner, a shining wit.

I should like to talk about an aspect of the health service that was not dealt with in the Queen's Speech or in the remarks of the Secretary of State for Health this afternoon. I refer to national health service dentistry. I have been concerned about the absence of such dentistry in my constituency, particularly in Market Harborough, for about eighteen months. I have asked questions twice of the Prime Minister. Once was at Prime Minister's Question Time, either late last year or earlier this year, and I received no answer—or certainly no comprehensible answer—from him on that occasion. I intervened upon him on Wednesday when he opened for the Government in this debate. Again, it seemed that he was wholly incapable of getting to grips with the problem, which, I am afraid, his Government have delivered to my constituents. I asked the Secretary of State for Health about what he proposed to do about the absence of NHS dental provision in my constituency. He, too, has been unable to provide any sensible answer.

I was first alerted to the problem in July 2001 when the chief executive of Leicestershire NHS health authority wrote to me to say that the largest dental practice in Market Harborough was intending to deregister its NHS patients. From memory it had about 10,000 patients on its register. There was a three-month delay period for the notice to bite, so it was November until those NHS patients were taken off that practice list. As a consequence they either had to become private patients of that practice, which is expensive, or to search the county and over the boundary in Northamptonshire to find alternative NHS provision. That was not easy.

Leicestershire health authority let me know by letter that it would take the following steps. It was going to advise NHS Direct of dental practices in the Market Harborough area accepting NHS patients. There was one and it soon filled up. Sadly, this spring, that practice deregistered its NHS patients. The health authority said secondly that it would deal with calls received as a result of the letter that this particular dental practice had distributed and would provide information to patients on dental practices in the Market Harborough area currently accepting NHS patients. As I have said, that has proved fruitless. It said that it would advise other dentists in the area of the action that it was taking to ensure regular communication on progress in re-registering patients in the Market Harborough locality. Those were all well intended actions, but useless in their effect.

The position got no better between July and the beginning of this year. It is not surprising that I, as the constituency Member of Parliament, received many letters from people living in and around Market Harborough asking what I could do to assist them in finding an NHS dentist. Once again, in February, I wrote to the health authority. In March the director of public health of Leicestershire health authority told me that he had been able to reach agreement in relation to two further mini-personal dental service sessions based in Oakham in Rutland. I do not know whether he has ever looked at a map, but Oakham is not readily accessible by public transport from Market Harborough and is about 20 miles away. He told me that two practitioners had entered into an agreement to set aside a total of four hours a week to provide care of individuals with urgent treatment needs. The round journey by public transport from Market Harborough to Oakham is about four hours. He said that the service would be charged through NHS Direct and treatment provided under occasional treatment regulations. Together with the mini PDS scheme operating in Melton, 30 miles away, it would mean that sessions would operate on Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Thursdays and Fridays. He told me that the Melton scheme was operating and the Oakham scheme should come into operation by 27 March this year. That is all fine and dandy if one lives in Melton or Oakham, but if one lives in Market Harborough one can go and suck one's teeth.

One would have thought that after nine months, and questions to the Prime Minister and the Secretary of State for Health, the Department of Health might have thought that there was something amiss. It is not as though this is peculiar to Market Harborough. I do not suppose that anyone on the Government Front Bench listened to the BBC Radio 4 programme "You and Yours" on the Wednesday before last, but the hon. Member for Rossendale and Darwen (Janet Anderson), my parliamentary pair, raised a similar question about the provision of NHS dentistry in her part of Lancashire. The problem of the absence of NHS dentistry—or at least of the decline in access to it—is therefore not limited to south-east Leicestershire. I suspect that hon. Members will have encountered the problem in constituencies across the country.

I have been sent a paper prepared by the body currently looking after the provision of NHS dentistry in my constituency. The Melton, Rutland and Harborough PCT came into existence on 1 April this year. It published the paper in July, in an attempt to set out the background to the problem that I have described. It said that NHS dentistry was available in three ways—through general dental services, through community dental services, and through something called personal dental services. It said that there were short-term solutions, and that there were a number of future developments that needed to be looked at.

The long and the short of the matter is that the PCT had no funding to provide that important aspect of NHS provision that it felt under a duty to provide. The paper concluded by stating:

"An important factor that needs to be considered is access to funding to implement any of the above options. Melton, Rutland and Harborough PCT do not have resources, which can be easily allocated to primary care dental services. Funding would have to be sought from the Department of Health when the best way forward is identified."

I cannot imagine why the best way forward—or any way forward—has not yet been identified. The paper added:

"We may also be able to identify funding through the LIFT initiative."

The trust is providing some short-term solutions, but they are wholly inappropriate for Market Harborough, and the paper said that they

"do not cover the needs of the whole PCT population."

In parenthesis, I should add that the PCT covers a geographical area that borders on Nottinghamshire in the north and Northamptonshire in the south, and covers almost all of eastern Leicestershire. It is a large rural area with a dispersed population, and it is no good for the Government, through their officials in the country, to say that setting up portakabins here and there miles away from Market Harborough is any answer to a real problem.

The paper concludes by stating:

"Longer-term solutions need resources that the PCT does not have access to. There is a national problem with the recruitment of NHS Dentists. Also we do not have the powers to mandate dentists to provide NHS services, so are dependent on a different approach to NHS dentistry being considered by the Department of Health."

I have yet to hear from any Department of Health Minister what intellectual activity is going on to sort out this problem, or what communication they have had with the Chancellor and the Treasury about the funds that will be made available to ensure that the NHS can do its duty to my constituents. It is a picture of indolence and incompetence that I see when I recite the history of the absence of NHS dentistry in my constituency.

I concede that there are practical and other difficulties in arranging for the purchase by the NHS of private dental services, but something needs to be done—and done quickly—if the absence of NHS dentistry in any meaningful sense is to be dealt with in the near future. We cannot go on wishing that something may happen. We cannot go on "looking into the matter", as the saying goes, without some firm proposals being made in the near future.

I therefore ask the Government to use their best endeavours to rearrange the way in which my PCT is funded so that the NHS dentistry that my constituents pay for through their taxes can be provided to them. Like all other citizens of this country, they are entitled to access to the NHS for dentistry as well as hospital services. They are not getting that access, and they are being short-changed.

That is bad enough, but matters are made worse when one considers that, if we are not careful, children may not get into the habit of going to the dentist, with all the health consequences in later life that that will entail. I therefore urge the Government to get off their bottom and do something about this problem very quickly indeed.

6.4 pm

Angela Watkinson (Upminster): I start by echoing the sentiments expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill). A great opportunity was missed yesterday to address the looming crisis in pensions. It was a notable omission in the Gracious Speech that no mention was made of pensions, savings or benefit reform, which is needed urgently. The problem has multiple strands. The level of savings is now so low that many people are heading towards an impoverished old age. The withdrawal of pension fund tax credits by the Chancellor to the tune of £25 billion already—that is £5 billion a year over five years, and in fact it is worse than that because that funding would have been invested and would have grown—is the single most damaging contributory factor to the problems that beset both money purchase and defined contribution pension schemes. It is the worst stealth tax of all, with the possible exception of the council tax.

The London borough of Havering has historically been underfunded to the tune of £30 million, and last year received a 12.5 per cent. increase. As a result of the long-awaited review, which we all expected would benefit the borough, Havering now faces a worsening situation and another massive hike in council tax rates, possibly in the region of 30 to 40 per cent. Pensioners on fixed incomes will be affected worst.

Add to the withdrawal of pension fund tax credits the £1.5 billion a year shortfall in rebates on contracted-out schemes, and the current regime is unsustainable. People who have been making pension contributions during their working lives now receive pensions on retirement way below former expectations, and their standard of living is not what they had looked forward to or planned for. Add to that the urgent need to simplify the pensions and benefits system, which is far too complicated for most people to understand.

I often have people come to my surgery who have been utterly defeated by 40-page benefit application forms. On one occasion, an elderly couple came with their younger neighbours, who had attempted to assist them. The form had defeated not only the couple in question but their neighbours, and they had filled it in incorrectly. That put my elderly constituents in a worse position than they were in the first place because their application was rejected.

There is also a worryingly high level of personal debt in the country, running to several thousands of pounds per head. Rather than save, many people choose to spend not only the money that they have but money that they do not have. One wonders what prospects some borrowers have of ever becoming free of debt.

I am sorry that the right hon. Member for Tyneside, North (Mr. Byers) is no longer in his seat, because I would have been happy to assure him that there is nothing elite about this Conservative. I was brought up as what used to be quaintly known as respectable working class. I think that the respectable bit referred to not getting into debt, paying one's bills and managing one's budget, however small it was. I remember debt being something that was whispered about. Banks required references when people sought to open a bank account, to ensure that the account holder was of good standing. These days, we are all plagued by unsolicited offers of credit cards and loans, with little or no investigation as to the ability of the person to repay.

There must be countless people who are heading for an impoverished retirement on an inadequate pension, with debts that will have to be settled from their estate, if they have one. The problem of estate values in Upminster may not apply because property values have

[Angela Watkinson]

rocketed in recent years, but I have many pensioners who are asset rich and cash poor. They have never been rich. Many have earned only modest incomes during their working lives, and they are house owners only as a result of a lifetime of hard work, prudence and making economies—of turning out lights, turning down heating to save on electricity and gas bills and not going to the pub. Home ownership has not come easily to them, but has come from the constant struggle to keep heads above budgetary waters. Many find this struggle difficult to sustain in retirement, as huge increases in council tax hit fixed incomes hardest.

Moving house to realise capital is not an attractive option for elderly couples, still less for individuals, who have lived for decades in the same familiar home, of which they are rightly proud.

The number of elderly and disabled people who approach me for advice is increasing all the time. The Department for Work and Pensions does not provide a local pension office; instead it uses local voluntary organisations such as citizens advice bureaux, Age Concern and, in Havering, the Havering Association for People with Disabilities, which runs advice surgeries.

That is a positive step in one sense because it makes venues more accessible in the community, but no funds are available. The Havering association has only £18,000 in core funding. It seems very unfair that small local charities helping their communities should be expected to subsidise the Department. The association loses income by making a room available for an advice surgery that would otherwise have been let to another group at a charge.

I hope that the Department will consider transferring some of the savings made from not running local offices from its petty cash or its paper-clip fund to help small local charities like the association, which are providing services for local people. The Government must take up the challenge this year: they cannot afford further delay. They must now simplify the system, enabling and encouraging more people to provide for a secure old age.

6.11 pm

Dr. Andrew Murrison (Westbury): Let me begin on a positive note, by welcoming the omission from the Queen's Speech of the threatened mental health Bill. I hope very much that the illiberal measures it would have contained will never see the light of day. What a pity that the much-needed overhaul of the Mental Health Act 1983 has been delayed by the Government's disappearance down a rabbit hole of their own making!

The loose definitions in those proposals, the apparent intended role of Ministers, and the misconstruction of detainment as treatment were unhelpful and sinister. We do not summarily detain or disadvantage those in this country who seem odd or unusual on the pretext that they might pose a threat to themselves or others. If I may sound pompous for a moment, let me say that to do so would be distinctly un-British.

I might add that of all the occupational groups I have encountered professionally and socially, ours presents itself as one of the greatest repositories of strange characters and odd behaviour. I am sure, therefore, that other Members joined me yesterday in breathing a sigh of relief.

The community care Bill reminded me of my own Bill to deal with bed blocking, introduced under the ten-minute rule. I am not about to confound the model that I proposed, which was based on a system that had been used quite successfully in Scandinavia. For what this is worth, it also found favour with Wanless.

The concept of cross-charging has merit, provided that it is construed in an administrative rather than a punitive way. At its heart must be a redistribution of resources from hospitals to less glamorous sectors. The reimbursement scheme suggested by Ministers must surely involve the expectation that fines will be levied on social services departments. They cannot "magic up" facilities in the community. Such fines will, I suspect, become part of the normal exchange between health and social care departments, and will have to be financed by central Government rather than—as I suspect is the intention—through council tax, at least in part. Otherwise, council tax payers would effectively underwrite, among other things, the loss of nursing home beds over which the Government have presided. The bed-block tax would of course apply unequally, with the south shouldering a particularly heavy burden, given the amount of bed blocking in London and elsewhere in the south.

The Secretary of State's assertion on 18 April that fines imposed on hospitals in the event of emergency readmission would stop them from discharging people too soon was disgraceful. Bureaucrats may think like that, but if the Secretary of State seriously believes that dedicated health care professionals would be motivated by incentives of that kind he gravely misunderstands what motivates those at the coal face of the NHS. My ten-minute Bill has, of course, sunk without trace, but its intention was to keep clinical decision making at arm's length from administration. In the context of reimbursement charges I believe that that is an important safeguard for clinical care—albeit one that looks increasingly naïve in the "command" NHS favoured by the Chancellor, if not the Secretary of State.

Ministers might also like to reflect on why emergency readmissions have increased. Could the reason be that people are being inappropriately placed as the number of available nursing home places shrinks? If so, acute units could rightly claim that readmissions were the fault of social services or social service structures, and fining hospitals on the over-simplistic basis that they are wholly responsible would therefore be inappropriate. I urge the Secretary of State to think twice about that incentive.

The Government's proposals include an incentive that health care professionals will willingly observe. It is a perverse incentive that acts in individual patients' best interests. If the quickest way to get a patient the community care that they require is to admit them to a district general hospital, with the consequential imperative for social services to avoid a fine and get cracking, let us be quite sure that GPs will admit them. I believe that that would wind back general practice several decades and that it would no longer enjoy its current position, which we would all celebrate. Once again, district general hospitals would be the nexus of health care provision in this country. That would be highly regrettable both for patients and professionals.

The flip side is that people who were not admitted through district general hospitals, for whatever reason, would be ascribed a lower priority. Effectively, the only gateway to services might become the DGH. I am sure that there are ways of moderating those effects and I would be very interested to hear about Ministers' plans in that regard.

The NHS Confederation is right to point out that the Government's timing is over-ambitious. It is also concerned about the lack of adequate piloting, which means that Ministers are taking a remarkable leap of faith. Unfortunately, Christmas is almost upon us and we are told that the systems that are necessary to implement the reimbursement system must be in place by Easter. I welcome the Government's sense of urgency; bed blocking is a tragedy both for the poor, hapless bed blocker and for the thousands whose admissions are cancelled because of lack of room. However, I believe that the NHS Confederation is right to counsel caution.

The Bill on health and social care reform brings forward grant-maintained or foundation hospitals; one can call them what one likes. They are a nice, if unoriginal, idea, but the devil is in the detail. One of the two DGHs that serve my constituents is unlikely to be in Ministers' sights. The clinically excellent Royal United hospital in Bath is acknowledged as an administrative disaster area. It is on such hospitals that I expect Ministers to focus first and foremost. I would oppose strongly anything that would drag resources and personnel from trouble spots such as Bath. For me, that is the priority and I hope that it is the priority for Ministers too, although I see little evidence of that in yesterday's proceedings. I wonder how the Secretary of State would address the leaching of top staff from, let us say, Bath, to the highly starred and potentially foundation Gloucestershire Royal hospital, given the pay competition that he proposes to introduce into what remains a monopoly sector.

My quest for bias not towards the swept up, but towards the struggling, is not purely parochial. I am pleased to have an unlikely ally in the right hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson). I was fascinated to hear that foundation hospitals would have elected representatives on their boards. Having struggled through the National Health Service Reform and Health Care Professions Act 2002 and tried to identify who on earth we would get to volunteer for patients forums, I do not know where the Secretary of State thinks he can get people who will be willing to serve on the boards in the numbers that he expects.

It was remarkable to hear the comments made by many hon. Members about the likely composition of the boards, which will, of course, be middle class. Voluntary organisations throughout the country have middle class members. Indeed, they overwhelmingly populate our voluntary organisations and that will be the case in respect of the new measure, if it is adopted. With respect, however, making such criticisms in the House is a case of the pot calling the kettle black. The House might like to look at itself before criticising volunteers throughout the country who will presumably be called on to serve on the boards of foundation hospitals.

The NHS Confederation is worried that foundation hospitals appear to constitute the Government's flagship health service reforms. It is right to worry. The organisation shares my view that we should not view health care as bricks, mortar, beds and hospital buildings or even as surgical operations, but refocus on managing chronic disease and the clinical networks necessary to do that. We should be less exercised and constrained by the administrative boundaries that have been the hallmark of the Government's stewardship of the NHS.

6.20 pm

Mr. Paul Goodman (Wycombe): In my constituency lies Hughenden Manor, which was once the home of Benjamin Disraeli. Disraeli spoke of two nations, the rich and the poor—or the vulnerable, as Conservative Members might say nowadays. I want to speak about poverty in relation to the Queen's Speech.

No Conservative Member should doubt the commitment of the Government in general and the Chancellor in particular to relieving poverty and social exclusion. The main means that the Government use to achieve that are programmes that appear to be devised in and controlled from the Treasury, and targeted at people whom the Treasury or Downing street identify. It would be churlish not to acknowledge that some programmes have played a part in providing opportunity and inclusion.

However, it would be foolish not to acknowledge that the regime of centralised command, which controls most programmes, has flaws and, indeed, a fatal error. I hope to have time to consider that later. I want to concentrate on three aspects of the flaws. The first weakness involves means-testing and the take-up of benefits. I know that that is a theme that has often preoccupied the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field), who is in his place.

Up to a third of all benefits are means-tested. That particularly affects pensioners, for three reasons. First, many pensioners do not realise that the benefits exist. In my constituency, that applies especially to pensioners from ethnic minorities, many of whom speak English as a second language or perhaps not at all. Secondly, some pensioners, especially older pensioners, are too proud to claim. Thirdly, as my hon. Friend the Member for Upminster (Angela Watkinson) said, some are simply confused, baffled and frustrated by the sheer number and depth of the forms that they have to complete. Anyone who doubts that is welcome to accompany me to a meeting with the Wycombe citizens advice bureau, which has to advise pensioners in difficulties.

The consequences are apparent in the figures. Between 1979 and 1995, the proportion of pensioners on means-tested benefits fell from 57 per cent. to 38 per cent. However, according to the House of Commons Library, the proportion will increase to between 56 per cent. and 59 per cent. by next April. Last year, almost 600,000 eligible pensioners were not receiving income support; more than 200,000 eligible pensioners were not receiving housing benefit, and more than 1 million eligible pensioners were not receiving council tax benefit. Pensioners who do not take up such benefits tend to be older and women. They are the principal victims.

Next April, the new pension credit will be introduced and the Government estimate a 67 per cent. take-up rate by 2004. Even the Department of Health described that

[Mr. Paul Goodman]

target as "ambitious". However, there is no firm proposal for hitting the target. I should like to quote from the report of the Select Committee on Work and Pensions, on which I serve, which is dominated by Labour Members. The report states:

"We were concerned about the Department of Work and Pensions' inability to produce reasonable estimates for such an important figure as the take-up of a key Government benefit."

I appreciate that the Minister is short of time, but will he tell us when we can expect to see the income-related benefit take-up figures for last year? They are normally issued in September. Alas, there is nothing in the Queen's Speech to ease the burden of means-testing.

The second weakness of centralised control involves area-based regeneration. I shall list six of most deprived boroughs in the country and state the number of schemes in them to help local groups relieve poverty. Manchester has 22 schemes; Tower Hamlets has 21; Liverpool has 21; Newham has 20; Hackney has 19, and Hartlepool has 18.

At this point, I want to quote the words of my hon. Friend the Member for South-West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous) in a debate on poverty in Westminster Hall earlier this year. He said:

"I ask the Minister to put himself in the position of a playgroup leader who wants better facilities, or of a community group leader who wants closed circuit television in a local park to protect playgrounds from vandalism . . . There is a strong argument for much more single-pot funding to make it easier for such groups to improve the environment that so many people who live in poverty have to put up with."—[*Official Report, Westminster Hall*, 18 July 2002; Vol. 389, c. 145WH.]

There is indeed a strong argument for more single-pot funding, but again, regrettably, I see few measures in the Queen's Speech that will permit that—and that leads me to the third weakness.

Last summer, the Select Committee on Work and Pensions produced its report on the Government's employment strategy. I would describe the biggest problem that it identified as that of low social capital. Those people who find it hardest to find and keep work are usually those who lack social capital—the connections and self-confidence that some of us take for granted. Many of those who lack social capital have not had the childhood love and security that some of us are prone to take for granted, and it is often those who lack social capital who are causing the antisocial behaviour that was a theme of the Queen's Speech, as it was in 2000 and in 1997. A good appearance, punctuality, courtesy, and the ability to work in a team are the soft skills that help people to find and keep work. It was the lack of soft skills and the social capital that builds them up that the Committee identified as the biggest barrier of all to finding and keeping work. It is significant that the Committee stressed that the best means of allowing people to develop their soft skills and thereby build up social capital was to extend flexibility and local discretion in the provision of the schemes that help them.

As the Secretary of State and all hon. Members will know, one of the themes of all three main parties during the party conference season was devolution, but it is becoming increasingly clear that the only real way of extending flexibility and of building up the social capital the lack of which is at the heart of so many of our problems today is a radical programme of devolution. I do not see the breaking of the regime of central command anywhere in the Queen's Speech.

If there can be a social exclusion unit and a neighbourhood renewal unit in the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, why can there not be at the centre of Government, as the Conservative party suggested at the last general election—my hon. Friend the Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts) is on the Front Bench and I hope to hear that suggestion raised again—an office of civil society or equivalent that would take the lead in devolving power to the local councils, charities, schools, clubs, faith institutions, voluntary groups and communities that are best placed to build up the social capital that we need?

There is a paradox here. It is curious to be calling for another Government office to solve the problem of devolution, but only the centre can devolve power from the centre, and there needs to be an engine in Government to do that. The Treasury is not that engine. We are not getting the devolution that we need to build up the kind of one nation society to which Disraeli was looking forward, and I am only sorry to say that such measures are not in the Queen's Speech.

6.28 pm

Mr. David Willetts (Havant): We have had a lively debate on the Queen's Speech, during which I think 20 hon. Members have spoken. Interventions have ranged widely, and I hope to comment on a few of them, but what has been particularly striking is that no fewer than four previous Secretaries of State have spoken. It is a bit like those wild west movies where the old gunslingers come out of retirement for one last appearance—in this case, out of retirement as Ministers, I hope not as Members of Parliament.

I was struck by the contrast between the interventions by the four previous Secretaries of State on the Conservative and the Labour Benches. My right hon. Friend the Member for South-West Surrey (Virginia Bottomley) spoke about her concern about the state of the health service. We also heard from my right hon. Friend the Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley). My right hon. Friends' speeches were striking because of the two themes that emerged: my right hon. Friend the Member for South-West Surrey referred to trusting the professions and the importance of allowing professionals to exercise their medical judgment, while my right hon. Friend the Member for Hitchin and Harpenden spoke about patient choice. Of course, we believe that those two themes together are the way to raise standards in our NHS. We think that the dynamism achieved by the combination of patient choice and professional freedom produces the best possible patient care. My right hon. Friends' two speeches referred to the true and best way to raise health care standards—what a contrast they made with the speeches by the two Labour former Secretaries of State, whom it is good to see in their places.

The right hon. Member for Tyneside, North (Mr. Byers) spoke for new Labour, while the right hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) spoke for old Labour. They were indeed the smooth man and the hairy man. Strikingly, whereas our two

former Secretaries of State combined provided a coherent alternative approach to the NHS, the right hon. Member for Tyneside, North, in what he described as his first intervention from the Back Benches for many years, produced a lot of rhetoric about new Labour, but not much reality as to what it means in practice.

The right hon. Member for Holborn and St. Pancras, speaking as one who was Secretary of State for Health in this very Government, gave a critique of the Government's health policies. It was hard to follow exactly what he proposed, but he seemed to say either, "Do not do any of it," or, "Do it properly so that all hospitals have the opportunity to enjoy the freedoms that are only on offer to 12 elite hospitals"—if I remember correctly the expression that he used in an article in *The Observer* recently.

We believe that the right way forward is to give as many hospitals as possible as soon as possible the full freedoms that will supposedly be enjoyed only by the foundation hospitals. I do not know whether the Secretary of State follows films, but "Groundhog Day" is to be shown on Channel 4 at the end of this week. For those of us who were involved in the health reform debate in the early 1990s, it is "Groundhog Day" all over again: we are hearing all our arguments on the need for greater freedom for individual hospitals to run their own affairs.

When I heard the Secretary of State trying to answer all those specific questions, I was reminded of nothing so much as the arguments that we made on how much freedom we wanted to give to self-governing hospital trusts. The right hon. Gentleman could do a lot worse than simply re-publish our consultation documents on how much freedom we wanted to give such trusts, which the Government abolished and are now to reinstate.

James Purnell: The hon. Gentleman is referring to his time as an adviser to the Conservative Government. In April, I asked him whether he would apologise for the fact that, when he advised that Government, the income of the bottom 10 per cent. fell by 17 per cent. in absolute terms. He said that he did not recognise those figures. Does he recognise them now, and how does he square them with his commitment to the vulnerable?

Mr. Willetts: If the hon. Gentleman is talking about the absolute income of the poorest members of our society, and if we are to measure that in the way that the Prime Minister now wishes to measure it—in other words, considering not the measure of poverty with which the Prime Minister began, but median income in 1997 and whether more or fewer people are poor against that measure years later, which is what he now talks about—I believe that, on the Prime Minister's chosen measure of poverty, we succeeded in reducing poverty during our period in office. If the hon. Gentleman wants to use a relative measure, we can argue about the case for relativity; if he wants to use the Prime Minister's preferred measure, I think that we have a proud record.

I want to speak briefly about the health agenda before discussing welfare reform. On our Front Bench, we have at least one new health spokesman—I welcome my hon. Friend the Member for Billericay (Mr. Baron) to his post—and that shows how much talent we have on this side of the House. We have fresh faces who will carry forward the battle—*[Interruption.]* I also welcome my hon. Friend the Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling), who has also joined our Front-Bench health team. We believe that more centralised control is not the right way to reform health. The way to improve the quality of our health service is to have greater freedom for hospitals. That must be the right way forward.

There are many Bills dealing with health in the Queen's Speech. There is also a Bill dealing with antisocial behaviour. I hope that the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions will be able to tell us whether his proposals on antisocial behaviour will include measures that concern the benefit entitlements of families who may be suspected of involvement in such behaviour. The right hon. Gentleman knows the history. At one point the Prime Minister proposed that child benefit should be taken away from families who were suspected of involvement with antisocial behaviour. It was one of those classic front-page "crackdown" stories. We all heard how the right hon. Gentleman was going to get tough on antisocial behaviour. Then he beat a hasty retreat. As often happens, it was the right hon. Member for Birkenhead who proposed an alternative that looked as if it might rescue the Prime Minister. The right hon. Member for Birkenhead said that housing benefit should be used instead, as it was the most effective device in using the benefit system to tackle antisocial behaviour.

Hon. Members on both sides of the House who have serious problems of antisocial behaviour in their constituencies know that one of the things that most concentrates the minds of the families who, sadly, seem to be responsible for such behaviour is the thought that if they carry on they may lose their house. None of us wants them to lose their houses, but the threat must be credible. If it is, it often leads to parents at last getting a grip on their children.

The right hon. Member for Birkenhead took the measure into Committee as a private Member's Bill. The Conservatives approached it constructively.

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead) *indicated assent.*

Mr. Willetts: I am pleased to see the right hon. Gentleman nod. I want to hear from the Secretary of State whether a proposal for withdrawal of housing benefit from people who behave in an antisocial way will be part of the legislation on antisocial behaviour. Will there be a proposal on child benefit as the Prime Minister originally suggested, or have the Government completely given up on the idea of using benefits to tackle that serious problem? I hope that the Secretary of State will be able to tell us about that. The Conservatives have no objection in principle to using the benefit system as a lever to tackle the problem. We want to hear what the Government's approach is.

Although there is that measure on antisocial behaviour, we do not have anything in the Queen's Speech on pensions—I declare the interests that appear in the Register of Members' Interests. I hope that the Secretary of State will offer us some account of what policies he will put before the House to tackle the pension crisis. So far, we have had confusion and uncertainty about what exactly the Government will do.

We have had debates about compulsion. Some Ministers are supposed to favour compulsion, others not. Will there be any reduction of the tax incentives for

[Mr. Willetts]

people to save? It is good to see a Treasury Minister on the Front Bench as I ask these questions. Do the Government recognise that, especially at a time like this, we need to give people more incentives to save, rather than taking away the modest incentives that exist? Is the Secretary of State looking at other incentives to encourage people to save? Does he recognise the serious long-term effects of the spread of means-testing on people's incentives to save—something on which the right hon. Member for Birkenhead has spoken eloquently?

Mr. Field: May I ask the hon. Gentleman to move a stage backwards in his argument? When he asks whether the Government will move on compulsion, is he not posing the wrong question? We have compulsion in the system. The question is how should we levy that compulsion? At the moment, because previous Governments have failed to ensure that everyone has a decent pension, taxpayers compulsorily pay 5p on each standard rate of tax to make good that deficit. Surely the question before the Government is whether we should continue with that form of compulsion to add to failure, or switch the compulsion to build for success?

Mr. Willetts: The right hon. Gentleman has put forward ambitious proposals to compel people to build funded pension saving. As he knows from the many discussions we have had on the matter, I do not agree with his proposals—I shall not detain the House by explaining why—but at least he has made a bold contribution to the debate. So have organisations such as—most recently—the National Association of Pension Funds and the Association of British Insurers. The one voice missing from that debate has been the Government's. We have not heard what the Department for Work and Pensions plans to do about the crisis. We want to hear what the Secretary of State thinks he can do. That might be too much to hope for, however. It might be over-ambitious to expect the Secretary of State to have a policy on pensions, although I must say that in the conditions of this debate we could promise him almost complete secrecy. He could unveil a confidential draft discussion document this evening and I am sure that we could assure him that there would be absolutely no media coverage, but even if a promise of complete confidentiality is not good enough and the Secretary of State feels unable to offer us any policies, could we make two more modest requests? First, will he at least accept that there is a crisis?

One thing that we have found most frustrating as we have debated the subject over the years is the sort of approach that is captured very well in a quote from the Secretary of State's colleague the Minister for Pensions, who said in May, when quoting one of the many sets of figures on pension saving which were subsequently shown to be wrong:

"These figures emphasise that the basic structure of pensions in this country is right."

It is reasonable to ask the Secretary of State whether he registers the scale of the problem. Does he plan to continue on working on the basis that the basic structure is right, that it does not need to change and that we should just tinker at the edges, or will he measure up to the scale of the crisis by proposing something big, bold and radical, which is what the crisis requires in order for it to be tackled? If I lower my expectations, and settle for the Secretary of State not offering a policy, will he at least offer some frank assessment of the scale of the problem?

Finally, if the Secretary of State is not going to offer us a policy or any assessment of the scale of the crisis, will he at least tell us how the Government propose to set about formulating policies to solve the problem? Will he at least tell us the framework within which he will set out the policies? Not only are we unsure about the Government's policies, we are not even sure about how they will unveil the policies that may emerge in future.

Kevin Brennan: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Willetts: No. I have only three minutes to conclude my speech.

We have had endless consultation documents—Pickering, Sandler and Myners. We have had various legislation too, yet we now have a debate in the press about whether there will be a Green Paper at the time of the pre-Budget report, whether there will be a separate Inland Revenue document and whether the Government will set up a royal commission. My view on royal commissions is that Harold Wilson put it very well when he said:

"Royal Commissions take minutes and waste years."

We do not have the time to wait for a royal commission, but if the Secretary of State can offer a framework that we can work within to try to tackle the crisis, I will end with the assurance that Opposition Members recognise that this is a problem that can be solved only with long-term planning and on the basis of some recognition of the need for stability in future, just as I gave an assurance that we would not get rid of stakeholder pensions. When the industry came to us and said, "We need to know that stakeholder pensions will continue" we gave that assurance, despite our concerns about stakeholder pensions. I hope that the Secretary of State will set out at least the framework within which he will approach the problem. So there we are. I have lowered my expectations. I am not asking for a policy. I do not necessarily expect an assessment of the scale of the problem. Even an account of how the Secretary of State might set about thinking about how to solve the problem would in itself constitute progress.

I am sorry that I have not had time to comment on the many speeches from hon. Members on both sides of the House. I was particularly struck by the number of speeches from Opposition Members on the subject of health. I particularly enjoyed the contribution from my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, West (Mr. Butterfill) on pensions. I always listen attentively to him and to my hon. Friend the Member for Wycombe (Mr. Goodman) on poverty and social capital. We now look forward to hearing whether the Secretary of State can at least inch us forward by setting out the framework within which he will solve the problem.

6.44 pm

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mr. Andrew Smith): As the hon. Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts) said, the debate has ranged widely—as is the case on these occasions—making it very difficult to do justice to all the interesting contributions from both sides of the House. However, one thing is clear: in the Queen's Speech this year, we can build on what we have achieved over the last five years in sorting out the economy, tackling poverty and social exclusion, getting people into jobs, investing in our public services and cutting crime. But as we recognised in putting forward the Queen's Speech, there is very much more to do, including in health and pensions, which we have been addressing today.

There has been a sharp contrast in the debate between the positive case that the Government can make and the weakness and contradictions from the official Opposition. While the Government can, on the basis of economic stability, carry forward investment matched by reform and opportunities matched by responsibilities so that we improve front-line service delivery, get to grips with antisocial behaviour and build a stronger society, it is clear that, despite some thoughtful contributions—I listened with great interest to the hon. Member for Wycombe (Mr. Goodman)—no coherent alternative is being advanced by the Opposition. So much for the 25 shiny new policies that they launched at their conference, which have been practically unmentioned during the debate. It is clear that the quiet man's approach is beginning to catch on on the Opposition Benches.

It is striking in these health debates that we always get at least one Conservative Member, and usually more, getting up and pointing to the health needs in his constituency, which invariably require more resources. The hon. and learned Member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier) made a powerful case for dentistry in his constituency, and good for him as a constituency Member. However, he asked Health Ministers whether they had been to the Chancellor to ask for more money. The Conservatives cannot put that argument across credibly while trying to convince people that they want lower public spending and to cut taxes nor, moreover, when they voted against the huge investment in the NHS that the Government are making.

Mr. Garnier: Let us assume that the Chancellor will not give the Department of Health any more money. How will the Government provide dentistry to Market Harborough?

Mr. Smith: As we have set out in our NHS plan and through the measures in the Queen's Speech, we will do that by devolving more power to localities, by putting more power in the hands of the front-line professionals and by structuring things so that there can be more response to local needs.

The hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox), who speaks on health for the Opposition, made a real doom-and-gloom speech in which he tried to persuade the public that the NHS was not working, that it had never worked and that it could not work; yet the Conservatives profess to believe in the NHS. He claims that administrators outnumber beds, but he does not tell us that he includes within non-clinical staff hospital cleaners, porters, catering staff and receptionists, all of whom provide direct support to NHS patients. He claims that we cut training for GPs. Wrong; between 1997 and 2001, the number of GPs in training has increased by 40 per cent.

Dr. Fox: The Secretary of State for Health did not understand the point that was being made. It is not that the numbers in training have not increased. The point concerns the numbers who have been trained but have decided not to take up a career in general practice. That is the problem that the Government face. The proportion of those trainees going into general practice has fallen, despite the fact that the number of training places has indeed gone up.

Mr. Smith: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman accepts that we have increased the training of GPs. He ought to accept also that we would be in a much stronger position had the Conservatives not cut the training of GPs by about 25 per cent. There would have been 1,000 more GPs in the NHS now.

The NHS is working. Thanks to the efforts of staff, it is delivering for many millions of patients. We are ensuring that there are 39,000 more nurses and 10,000 more doctors; 1 million patients are treated every 36 hours; 300,000 more operations are carried out each year; and there is the first increase in general and acute beds in the NHS for 30 years.

I was very pleased to see my right hon. Friend the Member for Tyneside, North (Mr. Byers) in the Chamber. He underlined just how important it is to maintain the momentum behind radical reform, matching social justice with economic efficiency and matching rights and responsibilities. That is precisely what the Queen's Speech does, with its reform of the criminal justice system, the comprehensive strategy for tackling antisocial behaviour and our proposals for public service reform.

My hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Highgate (Glenda Jackson) voiced apprehension about foundation hospitals but said that she was open to argument. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health will shortly publish a prospectus, which I think will address the concerns of the hon. Member for Oxford, West and Abingdon (Dr. Harris). As the innovation and development of foundation hospitals goes ahead in practice, I hope that my hon. Friend and my right hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) will be persuaded of the merits of the approach.

From my constituency experience—like that, I am sure, of many hon. Members—I believe that, given the strength of community, patient and staff support for good local and indeed specialist hospitals, giving them a bigger say, through a stakeholder council, with greater freedom to respond to local needs, will certainly result, as my hon. Friend the Member for St. Albans (Mr. Pollard) said, in improvements and give a greater sense of local ownership, responsibility and achievement, consistent with the strongest traditions of mutuality and co-operation that have been so important to our party.

[Mr. Smith]

I want to respond to the points on pensions made by the right hon. Members for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley) and for South-West Surrey (Virginia Bottomley). They, and the hon. Member for Havant, asked whether it was the Government's policy to put the whole pensions issue to a royal commission. As I told the Select Committee recently, it is vital that the difficult policy choices confronting us on pensions are faced up to in our forthcoming Green Paper—as they will be—and not simply parked in a commission. The public would not thank us for that. I do not, however, rule out the possibility of external bodies helping us to develop the way forward on specific issues, once the policy has been set after consultation on the Green Paper. I announced just such a proposal at the CBI last week, when I said that we wanted to create an employers' taskforce on pensions, to pull together examples of good practice, to spread and promote that good practice and to ensure that employers, along with the TUC, are fully involved in the further development of pensions policy.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, West (Kevin Brennan) made some important points about the position of employees affected by scheme closures, such as those at ASW. We can all imagine how dreadful it is for people who were counting on those schemes to provide a substantial proportion of their retirement income to have that cut away from them. We should never understate the anxiety and anger to which that gives rise. There are existing measures to protect the members of those schemes, but I understand the shortcomings to which my hon. Friend referred, including the situation when directors, often with privileged information, jump ship before the problems really hit.

Of course we are considering all those matters in the Green Paper, and they will be an important part of the national debate, which must go wider than just the Government, as we develop our policy. Within what has been a voluntary system, there is a balance to be struck between the protection afforded to those who are in a scheme, and requirements that could mean, if they are overly burdensome, that more schemes close or are never established in the first place. We cannot escape responsibility for dealing with that balance.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (James Purnell) spoke of a third way between voluntarism and compulsion, which I think was described as "assertive choice". I look forward to discussing that concept with him further. Compulsion has always struck me as something that is either there or is not, but his inventiveness in devising third way solutions is legendary. I await the detail of his proposal.

I am obviously unable to tell the House this evening what will be in the Green Paper, but I can confirm that it will be published later this year. I have set out the principles that we need to follow: fairness; security in retirement; informed choice for consumers on the savings and pension products available; simple and proportionate regulation; ensuring that incentives are effective and well-understood; promoting employment among older workers; and flexibility, which gives individuals more choice about the pace at which they retire from the labour market. In carrying those principles forward, we will need to build on partnership between Government, employers, employees and the financial services industry. In so doing, we need to ensure that the particular needs of different sections of the population are addressed. Here, I should emphasise the position of women, which, as the Liberal Democrats have pointed out, has often been neglected in respect of pensions policy.

The challenge is to build on the changes that we have already made—the way in which we have strengthened the state system—so that more employers and individuals can, and do, make provision for their pension. As I told the TUC and the CBI, we need to take a hard-headed look at the options. We need reforms that have the confidence of business, as well as trade unions. We need to recognise that it is no good preaching at workers to save if they lack the means to do so, or if they lack confidence in the products available. However, it is no good loading employers with so many requirements—so much red tape or so many costs—that they cast off any responsibility for helping their employees to build up a pension. It has to be worth while for employees to save. They must be confident in what they will get in return, and it must be easy for employers to contribute.

Mr. Butterfill: Can the Secretary of State comment on the existing anomaly whereby those who take their 25 per cent. tax-free lump sum get a tax break, but those who put all their pension pot into the purchase of an annuity get no tax break?

Mr. Smith: Those are the choices available to people within the system. The hon. Gentleman's expertise on these matters is acknowledged, and in asking his question he enables me to knock on the head the repeated claim that we will somehow use the tax system to end reliefs, and to hit high earners' pension contributions. Let me repeat the commitment that I, and Treasury Ministers, have given. We have no such proposals, and if we did, we would tell the House of Commons.

The hon. Member for Havant asked whether we had backed off on housing benefit sanctions, and about the position on child benefit sanctions. As I said in my opening remarks, this Queen's Speech puts forward a range of measures to tackle antisocial behaviour. On nuisance neighbours—the neighbours from hell—there are measures such as injunctions, fast-track evictions and antisocial behaviour orders. As far as those who truant from school are concerned, we are looking at the effectiveness of fixed penalty notices, fast-track prosecution and parenting orders. The test is what works: the measures that will be speedy and effective in stopping nuisance neighbours, and in stopping children truanting.

In this Queen's Speech, our approach to both health and pensions is to devolve power to front-line staff, to couple investment with reform, and to ensure that we can simultaneously build a strong economy and a strong society, in which we each fulfil our obligations to one another.

Debate adjourned.—*[Mr. Ainger.]*

Debate to be resumed tomorrow.

SITTINGS OF THE HOUSE

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 12 (House not to sit on certain Fridays),

That the House shall not sit on the following Fridays:

22nd and 29th November and 6th and 13th December 2002.—*[Mr. Ainger.]*

Question agreed to.

PETITION

Fishing Industry

7 pm

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): It is my privilege to present a petition from the fishing community of Fraserburgh, the most fishing-dependent area in the whole of Europe. The petitioners fear the destruction of the economic fabric of their community and of communities along the coastline of Scotland. In a few days, their campaign attracted 9,000 signatures and they now wish to see their cause represented at the highest levels of Government. They intend to take their campaign nationwide throughout Scotland.

The petition reads:

To the House of Commons

The petition of the people of the fishing communities of Scotland declares that we have grave concerns over the future of the fishing industry in the light of recent E.U. proposals.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons requires that Her Majesty's Government represent the interests of the Scottish fishing industry to ensure the long-term survival of the industry.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Local Government Funding (Derbyshire)

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn—*[Joan Ryan.]*

7.1 pm

Judy Mallaber (Amber Valley): I thank the Speaker for granting me this debate on local government funding in Derbyshire. I was greatly concerned to have missed being called in a previous debate on the funding review, especially as so many representations have been made to me by my constituents. I am pleased that other Members representing Derbyshire constituencies are in the Chamber, as they, too, may want briefly to contribute to the debate. I shall reiterate some of the points made by hon. Members in the previous debate, but I want to raise some issues relevant to Derbyshire that were not considered on that occasion. I shall begin with highways. That issue was only touched on in the previous debate and I did not raise it in my written submission to the review. I am concerned that Ministers are coming under great pressure not to change the current formula. We want to support the proposed new formula on highways.

The Under-Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Shipley (Mr. Leslie), may not be aware that the Woodhead pass on the Sheffield to Manchester road has already been closed this year due to snow. He may not know that Derbyshire county cricket club was the only one to have a first-class cricket match cancelled because of snow in June. We are very well aware of the problems caused by snow, but the new formula should none the less use temperatures rather than lying snow as a measure. They are more relevant when determining whether pre-gritting is needed.

Derbyshire grits about 52 per cent. of the total highway network—even more than the Audit Commission recommends—but that is essential for road safety. An icy or frosty road can be more dangerous than one where there is melting snow. Winter gritting takes place between 60 and 70 times a year in Derbyshire, but there is snow on only 20 of those occasions. Furthermore, when snow readings are taken, urban areas sometimes benefit due to the fact that snow has fallen in high regions elsewhere.

The proposed new highways formula also removes the threshold whereby Derbyshire gets no extra cash for traffic flows. Such money is mostly awarded to urban areas. A certain volume of traffic, such as heavy lorries, causes the same damage even if it flows during a longer period, so there should be some recognition of that, rather than an artificial cut-off point.

If Ministers do not agree to changes in the formula, Derbyshire will suffer twice. The main, and very busy, road through the county, the A6, and other roads have been de-trunked and the special grant of £12,000 per kilometre that we currently receive would be reduced to £5,000 per kilometre in the standard spending assessment. That would result in a loss of £1 million for the carriageway for which the county council has recently become responsible. We were told that the grant would continue for longer, but it will now be absorbed into the SSA after only nine months. We have not objected to that because the new standard spending assessment formula is more rational, but it will be a double whammy. We will be very upset if not only do we

[Judy Mallaber]

not get the new rational formula, but we also lose out on what we might otherwise have expected to get because we have taken over responsibility for the de-trunked roads.

On education, I will reiterate some of the arguments made in the previous debate, but also ask Ministers to consider a proposal that I made in my submission to the review, which seems not to have been considered. I have replied to 300 letters from constituents asking for the review to put right the unfairness in the present system, which has discriminated against Derbyshire children for many years. They support the arguments put by the worst funded education authorities for a proper basic level of funding per pupil. They are not arguing against extra help for those areas with great deprivation, but they cannot understand why children in more affluent areas, such as Hertfordshire, get more—£300 more per secondary pupil and £250 more for primary pupils. They do not understand why there is a home counties subsidy.

The sense of grievance undermines positive feelings about the additional resources that have come into education under Labour, which have been of huge benefit to our schools. If the problem is not recognised, it will undermine the good that has been done as a result of that extra spending. It needs to be recognised in some way that the current disparity in funding is not based on real educational and social needs, otherwise there will be huge disillusion.

I appreciate the difficulties for Ministers in trying to deal with that problem, as they face pressures from all sides, but surely there is only one principle, which is the one put forward by our education chair in Derbyshire—that similar schools with similar characteristics in different authorities anywhere in the country should get similar resources and be able to employ a similar number of teachers and support workers and have similar information and communication technology equipment and so forth. That is the basic principle. It might mean different amounts of cash going into different schools, but there would be parity between schools with similar characteristics.

How does that principle work for one of my head teachers, who moved from a southern county to Derbyshire? He moved to a similar sized school, but one that takes pupils from far greater areas of deprivation and has more statemented pupils. He had £300,000 less in his budget, which is equivalent to about 18 to 20 teachers on top of the present 73, than he would have had according to the formula in the county from which he came. That head teacher has emphasised to me his appreciation of the help afforded by the extra money that has come from the Labour Government. The school now has technology status. Frankly, he went for that because he could not afford to buy computers for the school. He appreciates that, but feels aggrieved—as do many of his pupils. The head of the neighbouring primary school told me that the Ofsted inspector frankly refused to believe him when he described the level of funding it received.

I want the Minister to respond to three points on education funding. Like hon. Members who represent other authorities, I want higher basic funding per pupil and I support the option that includes working families tax credit as one of the indices of deprivation, which should also apply to the social services formula. That system would better reflect poverty in rural areas, where unemployment figures may not be as high as in inner city areas, but pay levels are very low.

On the first day of the debate on the review, a major clothing company announced the closure of two more factories in my constituency and the neighbouring Erewash constituency. A huge number of jobs have gone in the east midlands in that sector. My neighbour, my hon. Friend the Member for North-East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes), lost 700 jobs at Biwaters in Clay Cross, but our local jobcentres tell us that those job losses have not been reflected in the recorded unemployment levels. Many of those involved must have disappeared from the register and may well have gone into much worse paid jobs elsewhere. Any change that would better reflect deprivation would give a truer reflection of local circumstances and needs.

Will the Minister consider a proposal that I put forward in my submission? In the previous debate, I was able to intervene to make the proposal, but I am afraid that I was rather unclear and he thought that I was talking about floors and ceilings as with the damping mechanism. I was proposing that there should be a mechanism to level up education authorities in the lowest quartile of SSA for the proposed new education spending blocks. I gave examples that included the education 2 proposal, and did not help authorities just because they got the area cost adjustment. The mechanism would level up the lowest funded education authorities.

We have a real problem locally. Every teacher and parent in Derbyshire seems to know about the gap between our area and others. Levelling up would be an easily demonstrable method of proving to those parents and teachers that we care and that we understand about the poor levels of funding. I ask the Minister for his response to that proposal.

We have been asked whether it matters that the funding of authorities such as Derbyshire is so much lower than elsewhere. We keep our education and social services spending above standard spending assessments to compensate at the expense of other services. The Government know that teachers are concerned about work loads. Our teacher contact ratios are substantially higher than nationally, a majority of heads in small schools teach more than half the week, all non-essential support services—curriculum development support, teachers' centres, community support and a range of other services—have been lost over the past 10 years and nearly half our key stage 2 pupils are in classes of 31-plus.

I visited an infant school in a severely deprived part of my constituency—a good school with beacon status. The head told me that when she meets heads elsewhere, she is amazed that they have the resources to allow non-contact time for infant and primary teachers. She told me of cuts in a major literacy project and how such shortages are limiting her school from making yet more progress. I ask the Minister to respond on the specific proposals that I have made, some of which were put forward by other hon. Members in the debate. The other specific proposal is about levelling up.

My next point, about the area cost adjustment, was well aired in the debate, so I will not go into it at length. However, at Prime Minister's Question Time on the day

before the debate, the Prime Minister reaffirmed the Government's commitment to help coalfield areas and talked about the resources that were going to help those communities to raise their aspirations. However, the consultation document does nothing seriously to reform the area cost adjustment, which makes coalfield areas such as Derbyshire subsidise the home counties solely because they are wealthier and, moreover, adds to the inflationary spiral in the south-east. They do not have higher costs that justify the huge subsidy. The ACA has gone up from 1.8 per cent. to 4 per cent. of costs. They sometimes have to pay higher retention payments for staff and put them higher up the scale, but not at a rate that justifies this ever increasing proportion going to the area cost adjustment. Surely joined-up government should not allow coalfield areas to be given money with one ministerial hand only to have it snatched away with the other.

Mr. Mark Todd (South Derbyshire): I have been following my hon. Friend's argument on the ACA—an arid area of what is already a dry topic. As I remarked in the last debate, of the options that are available on the area cost adjustment, following the existing NHS formula for allocating assumptions on increased costs is surely the best. It is a tried and tested formula, established in the largest employer in Europe, and should surely be commended in local government.

Judy Mallaber: I thank my hon. Friend, who is more on top of these arid arguments about the ACA than I am. I commend his suggestion to the Minister, who I am sure will respond favourably.

Perhaps the Minister could also respond to the suggestion, made partly in jest and partly seriously, that if some wealthier counties with higher salaries are so worried about losing out, we could add a couple of higher council tax bands, expand their tax base and use that as part of the review of local government. That might be one element to throw into the equation when considering the finance review.

I plead with the Minister not to choose options that build on past spending patterns and unfairness, as is the case with some of the proposals on police, fire and resource equalisation. On the police, for example, all the options are bad for Derbyshire. One would enable us not to use past establishment figures. Derbyshire county council did very badly historically related to the establishment figures. There is great advantage in phasing it out. Surely there is no justification for basing new options on past spending patterns which were unfair. That relates to other areas as well, of course.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): Is my hon. Friend aware that there is a particular problem in the proposed formulae for shire counties in general, and that almost 90 per cent. of them in all the categories provided lose out? I know that the size of the cake is growing, but the proportion that is going to shire counties is shrinking if we follow this particular formula. Derbyshire has serious problems. In this area it requires about a 5 per cent. increase in the next settlement in order to stand still in its expenditure.

Judy Mallaber: I thank my hon. Friend for his helpful comment. We have serious problems in this area and I hope that, within the difficulties that we have with all the formulae and current budget settlements, we do not exacerbate that but improve it, by at least not basing the new formula on past establishment figures.

Mr. Todd: My hon. Friend touched on the issue of resource equalisation—perhaps an even more arid area in this dry topic. May I draw her attention to the fact that what appears to be the thrust of this is to establish a set of formulae to establish need, but then to say that we will throw that away and track back to previous spending patterns which may well have been justified by the authorities in question and their electorates, but should not be the basis for the allocation of Government resources?

Judy Mallaber: I agree, and I am grateful that my hon. Friend is so assiduous and understands all the complex arguments in all these issues.

Finally, on social services, I have no particular arguments on the options, other than to reiterate the argument for using working families tax credit within the deprivation index. Obviously, that is relevant to social services too. Overall there is an inadequacy in the global amount of social service funding, which requires Derbyshire to spend substantially above standard spending assessment in order to meet the basic needs of our residents in the county.

Those are the main points. All of us could go on endlessly, but I should leave sufficient time for the Minister to reply to those points.

7.17 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. Christopher Leslie): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Amber Valley (Judy Mallaber) on securing the debate. There is a lot of competition for time to debate local government finance, believe it or not, and the measure of support from hon. Members representing that county is evident today. My hon. Friend has covered a remarkable number of points in her speech and I shall try to address as many of them as possible.

My hon. Friend is particularly concerned about funding for schools, and has registered her support for the proposal put forward by the F40 group. I am aware of the strength of feeling about this issue in the F40 group and in Derbyshire, following recent meetings with representatives. I know that my hon. Friend the Minister for School Standards has also been discussing with the F40 group delegation how the current funding review might impact on their authorities. I understand that there has been a constructive exchange of views.

It might be helpful if first I provide some background to our plans to introduce the new funding system. Hon. Members will know the range of general issues and difficulties that we face, and I do not intend to spend time repeating the general points made elsewhere. There was widespread agreement that the formulae for distributing grant needed to be overhauled. We have been working hard to devise a new system that will deliver our aims of a fairer, more transparent system for the distribution of the local grant. It is important to emphasise now one significant change from the old principles of the standard spending assessment, whose

[Mr. Christopher Leslie]

original idea was to deliver a standard level of service for a standard level of council tax. That approach has not worked. We are all clear that such an approach is fundamentally incompatible with our objective of giving greater freedom and discretion to local authorities. Rather than pretending that we can say how much councils should spend, under the new framework we are focusing on how we divide up grant—real money—between authorities.

Unsurprisingly, we have received many representations from local authorities about how they wish to receive grant. The formula review is about the distribution of a pot of money between authorities. As my hon. Friend the Member for North-East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes) noted, everyone argues for a bigger slice of the cake. We cannot give all authorities a greater share, but I can reassure the House that the system will consider the relative needs of different authorities and determine grant on that basis.

My hon. Friend the Member for Amber Valley mentioned highways, and the formula issues that affect local government spend in that area. The Government have looked carefully at the current highway maintenance formula throughout the review, and we share concerns that the indicators do not seem appropriate for assessing the cost of road maintenance. That is why we propose that the new formula should consist of a basic amount per kilometre of road, with top-ups for traffic flow, winter maintenance costs and pay costs. We are considering all the responses that we have received, including concerns about special grant for de-trunking, and so forth. We will make our decisions known when the final results are available.

With regard to the options for the education formula, it is worth reiterating that considerable increases in funding for education are coming through, thanks to the spending review, over the next three years. In addition, hon. Members will know that the Government have given clear commitments that no authority's schools will lose out in real terms.

For the education formula itself, we want a fair clear system that is justified by the educational needs of children, and based on more up-to-date evidence of cost and need. Any formula will need to have an element for deprivation, and enhancements for areas where schools need to pay more to recruit and retain staff.

Under the current system, the main reason why authorities in London and the south-east receive a higher level of funding than other authorities such as Derbyshire is that they receive extra funding through the area cost adjustment to take account of the extra cost of recruiting and retaining staff in the area.

Options set out in the consultation paper are based more on evidence that suggests that authorities with significant deprivation and additional staff costs need to spend significantly more to achieve the same results for their children. I accept that there is scope for judgment about the evidence, but the four options that we have reflect that.

Judy Mallaber: The group of northern counties has produced an analysis that shows that many of the areas that get extra money through ACA are spending the extra money not necessarily on education services but on other services, or to keep council tax levels down. It is not clear that the new formula really measures actual needs, and the resulting disparity in funding is substantial.

Mr. Leslie: Obviously, there are differences of opinion between local authorities on that point. However, I hear what my hon. Friend says. I know that the F40 group, of which Derbyshire is a member, has expressed its dissatisfaction with the four new options set out in the consultation paper. That is why the option 5 proposal has been made, and I have received a great weight of correspondence from F40 authorities in support of that. I can reassure the House that we have considered all those matters carefully, and we will try to take them fully into account when we make the final decision.

I should make it clear that in introducing the new funding system, our aim is to produce the best possible match between the distribution of funds and the differing circumstances and needs of local education authorities. I hear the interesting proposal concerning the lowest funded quartile of education SSAs. Even though the consultation has closed, my hon. Friend the Member for Amber Valley incorporated the proposal in her earlier submission, and we will certainly consider it.

Option 5 suggests that money be taken out of the factor in the formula for deprivation and put into the basic allowance per pupil. That would, of course, have an impact on authorities with high levels of deprivation. In working up a new funding system we need to consider how changes will affect all authorities, not just those in the F40 Group.

My hon. Friend the Member for Amber Valley touched on other issues in relation to authorities with sparse populations. We intend the formula to contain a "sparsity" element to reflect the costs of home-to-school transport. We also hope that transport funding in each LEA will contain an assessment of the impact of sparsity. We estimate that in the new formula, 60 per cent. of the transport element in the LEA block, for example, will be distributed through the sparsity index. That may be to the benefit of Derbyshire.

My hon. Friend the Member for Amber Valley mentioned that the area cost adjustment was a significant issue. My hon. Friend the Member for North-East Derbyshire (Mr. Barnes) urged us to look at ways in which it might be changed. Numerous research projects have been undertaken over the years to find a better solution. We conducted research relatively openly. It is out there for people to see. We have thoroughly reviewed the way in which the area cost adjustment is calculated. Different research proposals were developed and have been widely debated.

There has been much discussion about which data source to use, which type of economic model to use, and where the boundary lines should be drawn. I think that about 21 different options for area cost adjustment have been proposed. There is little agreement between authorities on the merits of the options. While the vast majority of people recognise that pay costs should be recognised within the system, how we do that and what weighting we place on it are obviously matters for the Government.

Judy Mallaber: May I at least tempt my hon. Friend to say that we will not carry on with the ever increasing proportion that is going into the ACA, and at the very least, that the trend will come down rather than continue to go up?

Mr. Leslie: My hon. Friend may tempt me in that regard—but whether she succeeds is another matter, and I am afraid that I cannot give any announcements or decisions on that. We must take these matters in the proper order.

My hon. Friend mentioned that introducing higher council tax bands might be part of a solution for authorities if they wished to expand their tax base. The matter obviously relates to the revaluation of council tax banding and whether it should start in 2005, with bills then issued for the financial year 2007 based on that revaluation. The Government are concerned about the fairness of the tax system, but we are also listening to the views of taxpayers and local government about council tax bands. The matter may well have an impact on finance, but I should mention that dwellings in band H account for less than 1 per cent. of the total number of dwellings in England, so increasing the number of bands above that would not necessarily result in significant increases in the local tax base.

Mr. Barnes: Might not an additional approach be to make the difference between the amounts that people in different bands are expected to pay more progressive? The property value in the top band is eight times that in the bottom band, but the highest resulting payment is only three times what people in the lowest band pay. If the range was greater, more money could be drawn from the top and less from the bottom.

Mr. Leslie: These are interesting debates. They are separate from the formula grant review, I might add, but they are issues of significance and we will come to them when we address the question of revaluation and council tax banding.

I want briefly to touch on some of the overall issues. It would not be right to look at Derbyshire in isolation from the bigger issues of local government funding. This year we have seen an 8.8 per cent. increase in resources for education. Resources for social services have risen by more than 3 per cent. in real terms each year since we took office. This year, expenditure on policing has increased by 6.1 per cent.

There is better to come over the next three years. For social services, there will be an average increase over the next three years of 6 per cent. in real terms. Spending on education will rise by 6 per cent. for the next three years. For policing there will be an extra £1.5 billion, more than in the financial year 2002–03. There will also be more money for the environmental, protective and cultural services area of expenditure.

Derbyshire has also benefited significantly from extra money under this Administration. Whereas it received a 1.8 per cent. increase in the last four years of the previous Administration, under this Government we have typically seen 5.1 per cent. increases. The increase in spending on education in the past five years has been 37 per cent. Whereas in 1997 the capital increase was £4 million, in 2001–02 it was £50 million, this year it was £37 million, and next year it will be £27 million. Significant sums have also been made available to Derbyshire for social services.

Judy Mallaber: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Leslie: I am afraid that I do not have much time. I want to make a couple more points. We have consulted at length. We have considered all the issues carefully. There is a guarantee that no authority will lose out. We want a transparent system that ensures that authorities get a fair grant. That is the intention and the approach that the Government wish to take.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at half-past Seven o'clock.

House of Commons

Friday 15 November 2002

The House met at half-past Nine o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Orders of the Day

Debate on the Address

[THIRD DAY]

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question [13 November],

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, as follows:

Most Gracious Sovereign,

We, Your Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, in Parliament assembled, beg leave to offer our humble thanks to Your Majesty for the Gracious Speech which Your Majesty has addressed to both Houses of Parliament.—*[Mr. Foulkes.]*

Question again proposed.

Education, Culture, Media and Sport

9.33 am

The Secretary of State for Education and Skills (Mr. Charles Clarke): I welcome today's debate, because education, culture, media and sport are critical parts of our national life. I hope that we will have a good debate, and in the spirit of friendship that I hope will characterise our discussions today, I thank the shadow Cabinet for agreeing to combine education with culture, media and sport.

I am delighted to be here with my colleague the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, because the first sentence in a speech that I made after becoming Secretary of State for Education and Skills was that I wanted children to enjoy school. An essential part of enjoying school is found in the relationship that schools need to have with arts, culture and sports organisations. My first bilateral meeting with a fellow Secretary of State after my appointment was with my right hon. Friend, precisely to discuss how we could progress that work.

I am also grateful to you, Mr. Speaker, for deciding that the two subject areas should be debated together. My right hon. Friend will deal with the two main measures for which her Department is responsible—the communications Bill and the licensing Bill, which is published today—later in the debate. I hope that all hon. Members understand that that is the most effective way to proceed. I shall focus on education issues.

I begin by putting on the record my tribute to my predecessor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Estelle Morris). She was not only an outstanding Secretary of State, but an outstanding Education Minister throughout the period since the Labour Government were elected in 1997. I worked closely with her within the Department and I think that her conviction, her power and her passion have made a major contribution to transforming the quality of education in this country. I think that she was too harsh to herself in the judgment that she made in deciding to resign. If I can reach anywhere near her level of achievement, I will consider myself to have done more than well.

The purpose of the Queen's Speech debate is to enable us to discuss the programmes and policies not only of the Government of the day, but of the Opposition parties as well. If, in the course of the debate, I point out some of the inconsistencies and weaknesses in Opposition policies, I hope that I will not be called a bruiser. I am working with my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport to connect with my feminine side. I intend to set out six questions for the Conservatives and four for the Liberal Democrats—questions that I think they need to answer when explaining their thinking and their policies for the country. The numbers are not equal because I do not think that the Liberal Democrats have achieved the status of official Opposition—yet. It will be interesting to see in the coming year whether they succeed in doing so.

Let me give the hon. Member for Ashford (Mr. Green) some candid advice: his party does not have a problem of leadership; its problems are those of identity and policy. People simply do not know where the Conservatives stand. I hope that he will be able to help us in that respect when he answers the questions that I will ask him today.

A major theme of the Gracious Speech is the need to affirm rights and responsibilities. Today, I reaffirm the Government's journey of reform based on a strong society, moving away from a one-size-fits-all system to personalised services based on the needs and aspirations of the individual. We aim to achieve that by breaking up sometimes monolithic structures and devolving powers to front-line leaders of the profession. Diversity and choice will, in our opinion, breed creativity. We believe that it is our role as a Government to support the teaching profession and all those working within the education service, and that the key means of doing so are investment in and reform of those services.

The Gracious Speech stated:

"My Government will introduce a Bill to tackle anti-social behaviour that damages communities."

We see the education service as a key player in that respect. We believe in rights for children and responsibilities for parents. In that legislation, we will set out a comprehensive strategy to tackle antisocial behaviour in our communities. We will continue to be tough on truancy and tough on the parents of truants, for the simple reason that truancy damages children's education and their future prospects, and is a major risk factor behind street crime and antisocial behaviour.

We believe that parents have both a legal and a moral responsibility to ensure that their children attend school regularly. It is wholly unacceptable for parents to

[Mr. Charles Clarke]

condone their children's truancy from school. The figures are stark: every day 50,000 children are absent from school without the schools' permission—an enormous number. In the recent truancy sweeps that we organised, half the children stopped were with their parents. Unauthorised absence has remained at a constant 0.7 per cent. of half days missed since the data were first published in 1994.

The Government believe that those figures are simply not good enough, and we must work to improve them. Truancy damages not only children, their hopes and aspirations, but society as whole, because it can lead to crime. We must therefore deal with it, and we are setting out a number of clear steps to do just that. We will establish parenting orders to require parents to attend parenting skills classes, and we will be ready to take legal action to put that into effect. We will establish a co-ordinated programme of truancy sweeps even beyond what we have done so far, especially in areas where there is the highest rate of street crime. We will work to build much stronger relationships between schools and police, including, in some instances, having police located in the toughest schools to help build the team that is necessary to tackle these issues.

We have a number of other specific measures. These are targets for local education authorities and schools, funding for electronic registration systems in high-truancy areas, a publicity campaign to address the responsibilities of parents, extending truancy sweeps, as I have said, increasing powers to magistrates to impose sentences on parents, and a pathfinders scheme to speed up the existing prosecution system.

Mr. Nick Gibb (Bognor Regis and Littlehampton): I am not unsupportive of the measures that the Government are proposing on truancy, but has the right hon. Gentleman's Department done any work in analysing why truancy rates are so high in this country? They are significantly higher than those in other continental European countries, especially Switzerland, where the rate is virtually zero.

Mr. Clarke: We have done some work on this, but we need to do more. I was about to say that we need to commission more research. I would initially identify two or three reasons. First, there was a real growth in truancy rates over the 20 years before we came to office. There was the "there is no such thing as society" way of looking at things. In some families in some estates in some parts of the country the ethos of social responsibility has been weakened. We see it as part of our responsibility to try to build that up.

Secondly, there is the serious question whether the curriculum, in some secondary schools in particular, is sufficiently challenging for the children. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary is preparing proposals, which I shall come to later, to see whether we can make changes to deal with those aspects as well. We are conducting research, but the hon. Gentleman is perfectly entitled to make that point.

The first question that I come to is for the Liberal Democrats. I am sure that the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis) will address the matter when he speaks, and I hope he will. My question is whether they will support our measures to deal with truancy. I say to the hon. Gentleman in all candour that if the Liberal Democrats decide that they will not support our measures, I think that the people of this country will judge them in an adverse light. The people acknowledge that there are real problems.

I now come to my first question for the Conservatives. The question of home-school contracts comes into the area that we are discussing. The hon. Member for Ashford said at the Conservative party conference:

> "We would allow heads to require parents to sign a contract with the school ... and we would give those contracts legal backing."

That is what the hon. Gentleman is reported as saying. I am sure that he will tell the House whether he stands by that.

I believe that that statutory backing proposal could cause chaos. Putting into place legally enforceable contracts covering millions of school children would be not only a massive bureaucratic burden but a massive enforcement burden. Does the hon. Gentleman propose that heads should be expected to take parents to court? If not, who would be? Implementation of his proposal would open up schools to a new range of legal challenges from parents who felt that in the school contract the school might be failing to provide them with adequate information—for example, about their child's progress. That is the sort of issue that I raised when responding to the intervention of the hon. Member for Bognor Regis and Littlehampton (Mr. Gibb) about the nature of the curriculum as it operates. Parents might feel that they need legal recourse.

I hope that the hon. Member for Ashford will give us more details about his proposals to provide a statutory backing to the home-school contracts and how he intends to deal with the problems that I have described.

Dealing with antisocial behaviour is a core issue for us in the Queen's Speech. We will play our part with our colleagues in the Home Office and other Departments in developing legislation that will take us forward.

Mr. Christopher Chope (Christchurch): Before the Secretary of State moves on to another subject, will he tell us what the Government are going to do about antisocial behaviour within schools? When I talk to sixth formers in schools, they are concerned that they are being denied the right to learn because of the disruptive behaviour of other pupils.

Mr. Clarke: The hon. Gentleman is entitled to make that point. My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary is addressing these matters in great detail. The best short answer to his question is yes. The answer is to give more power to the profession—teachers—to deal with these problems in appropriate ways. There are a number of specific measures, such as investment in pupil referral units, that are important to help deal with the situations that can exist. However, the most important thing is to get a sense of order in the classroom. If we are to do that, the role of the teacher is critical. Our job is to help teachers in that, and that is what we will do. We shall make specific proposals in the near future—before Christmas—to deal with that specific point. The hon. Gentleman was right to raise the matter.

The roots of these issues start earlier, as I have indicated. In our work on early years and pre-school arrangements, we believe that it is critical to intervene in a serious way to stop the long-term cycles of decline that cause some of the problems that we are describing. Our sure start programme has been a critical element in that approach, with its objectives of improving social and emotional development, health and ability to learn, and of strengthening families and communities.

We are working with our colleagues in the Department of Health and the Department for Work and Pensions to ensure that we can roll out the programme substantially throughout the country. We also wish to ensure that in every area all the professions are working together in the way that has been so well piloted in the sure start areas. For example, we want to see teachers, social workers, police, health visitors and housing officers working as a real team to try to address the needs of children. The truth is that intervening early and effectively in this way is the most effective way of ending some of the cycles of despair that have been present.

We are proud that in terms of our comprehensive spending review targets, in 1998 our target was to

"Increase provision of nursery places for 3-year-olds from 34 per cent. to 66 per cent. by 2002, focusing on the most deprived areas of the country."

We over-achieved on that target, and 70 per cent. of three-year-olds are now able to access a free place. We see this entire approach as central. We believe that in the past not enough attention was given to early years. Similarly, in some ways, not enough attention was given to primary education. We are determined that that will no longer be the case.

I now come to my second question for the hon. Member for Ashford. I have been unclear about the position of the Conservative party on sure start. I read that the Conservatives proposed to establish a small national agency and a national programme delivered by charitable and voluntary organisations that would, in their words,

"target support for parents with troubled children".

Their programme is costed at no more than £80 million.

The effect of that approach would be to close 80 sure start programmes. The total average assumed spending for a sure start programme is £1 million. We have a significant extra budget compared with to the budget that the Tories intend to operate. Let us clarify today whether it is Conservative policy to close 80 sure start programmes. Let us clarify also what Conservative proposals are and whether the Opposition see sure start as the priority that I think most people believe it to be.

Primary and secondary reform must be at the heart of any Secretary of State's educational priorities. I shall begin with a reference to the A-level issues, because of the media background and because I gather that the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough intends to raise the matter. In my constant spirit of helpfulness, I am keen to answer his question before he asks it, so that he can comment on it directly.

The issues during the summer relating to A-level grading were referred to the former chief inspector of schools, Mike Tomlinson, who has been widely respected throughout the education service. On 2 October he wrote to my predecessor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Yardley, making clear the criteria on which the grading of papers would be reviewed:

"For those units where the Accountable Officers' . . . changes to the A/B or E/U grade boundaries recommended by the Chairs of Examiners were larger than the normal pattern for legacy A-levels"—

that is the essentially the point that is being made by the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough, as I understand it—

"there should be a review of the relevant mark grade boundaries. This review will be completed and any revised results issued to students by Tuesday 15 October."

In other words, any grade boundaries that have been adjusted by more than was expected under the previous A-level regime were reviewed. That was a clear benchmark and, moreover, one that was accepted by all the parties involved, including those who made the original complaints.

As the hon. Gentleman knows, Mike Tomlinson's final report on the review of gradings was published on 15 October. My predecessor reported the result to Parliament on that day. The Government have full confidence in the Tomlinson inquiry. It was welcomed by the main head teacher bodies and it involved them. I do not believe that there is any basis for reopening the inquiry. That is my response to the hon. Gentleman. Obviously he will say more about he matter if he wishes to do so. The issue raises another question for the Conservatives, and it is my third question to them. The Leader of the Opposition stated in the House:

"No one even knows whether they are worth the paper that they are written on."—[*Official Report*, 16 October 2002; Vol. 390, c. 311.]

Is that the position of the hon. Member for Ashford? Does he believe that A-levels are not worth the paper they are written on? We certainly do not accept that—A-levels are a vital standard in our education system, and we are determined that that should continue. An overwhelming number of A-level students, parents and teachers will deeply resent the suggestion from the Leader of the Opposition, a senior politician, that A-levels are not worth the paper on which they are written. My question is therefore direct—does the hon. Member for Ashford agree or not agree with the point made by his right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition?

On primary and secondary education more generally, the Queen said in the Gracious Speech:

"Raising educational standards remains my Government's main priority for Britain's future prosperity. Secondary school reform will continue to promote opportunity and choice through greater diversity for parents and pupils."

Our main focus must be quality and standards in primary and secondary education. Success has already been achieved in primary schools, with the best results ever, established standards and an accountability framework, but we now need to accomplish the transformation of secondary education into a new diverse system that will be specialist in ethos and focus on the individual child's talents. I call that "comprehensive plus"—we need a system that ensures that every child is fulfilled and can achieve their aspirations.

I have a question for the Liberal Democrats. I have read that their policy is to stop support for the specialist schools system.

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale): There is only one Liberal Democrat in the Chamber.

Mr. Clarke: That is a characteristically unfair Conservative attack on the Liberal Democrats. I am sure that the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough will explain that his colleagues make a priority of supporting him in his important party work on education. I am told that it is Liberal Democrat policy to abolish the specialist schools programme. I would be grateful if the hon. Gentleman would confirm that his party are proceeding with that policy.

Mr. Phil Willis (Harrogate and Knaresborough): I am grateful for the right hon. Gentleman's interest in Liberal Democrat policy, particularly as the Government constantly include it in their legislation. However, can he quote a single word from any speech or document produced on behalf of the Liberal Democrats to support his comments?

Mr. Clarke: I do not have the full text of speeches at this year's Liberal Democrat conference, but I understand that the document considered by that assembly stated that all decisions would be taken by schools; everything about the running of schools would be dealt with by individual schools, not by any centralised—as the hon. Gentleman would put it—system. The specialist schools programme is a centralised programme to support schools throughout the country. I may be wrong about Liberal Democrat policies. If so, I am happy to be corrected and learn that the Liberal Democrats are supporting our programme—that is why I put a question to the hon. Gentleman. The basis of my remarks, however, is the document that was submitted to the Liberal Democrat assembly earlier this year.

Mr. Willis: It is good to have a debate in the House on Liberal Democrat policy. The right hon. Gentleman will know—indeed, the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Estelle Morris), the former Secretary of State, will confirm—that my criticism and that of my party of the specialist school programme is that it creates a two-tier system in our schools. The Government's initial approach was to give a small number of schools specialist status, with £0.5 million extra over a period of five years. Our objection is simple—every single school should be able to bid for those resources provided that they meet the relevant criteria. Moreover, it is not up to the Secretary of State to decide—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): Order. The hon. Gentleman will have a chance to make his points a little later.

Mr. Clarke: I am grateful for your protection, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I was feeling sensitive and in difficulty about the hon. Gentleman's charges. I hope that he can set out his position clearly later and confirm that he does support our specialist school programme, which, as he says, is open to all schools.

Mr. Willis: The right hon. Gentleman said in *The Times* that all schools would not get specialised status.

Mr. Clarke: We can have a proper exchange later—I hope that the hon. Gentleman sets out his policy and position clearly. Specialist schools are important and should be substantially expanded. I would welcome support from Liberal Democrat councillors up and down the country and from local education authorities for that programme.

Standards are the key issue and we must focus on them. First, on key stage 2 standards, we can claim a good deal of success. In mathematics, the proportion of children getting level 4 or above—the standard we have set—has gone from 58 per cent. in 1998 to 68 per cent. in 1999, 71 per cent. in 2000, and 70 per cent. in 2001. Early statistics for 2002 indicate that is now 73 per cent. The record in mathematics is largely successful, but about English, in some respects, we can be less optimistic. We did well at the beginning, achieving an improvement from 64 per cent. to 70 per cent., then up to 74 per cent. in 2001, but that has reached a plateau, remaining at 74 per cent. in 2002. Throughout this year, to fulfil the commitment in the Gracious Speech, we shall try to continue to drive up standards in English in particular. It is important that we carry that through.

Mr. Gibb: Having cited those figures, how does the right hon. Gentleman explain the findings of Professor Timms in Durham university's evaluation unit? He says that since 1997 there has been no statistically significant improvement in literacy in year 6.

Mr. Clarke: I very much welcome, and do not dismiss at all, the important contribution of serious academics, of whom Professor Timms is one, to the debate. Different data sets are used for different analyses, and people make judgments on them. At the end of the day, however, I look at Ofsted's conclusions and examination results. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will acknowledge that I have not come to the House saying that everything has been wonderful. I have just said that results have reached a plateau, and we have to deal with that. There will be a lot of academic commentary, including from Durham university, which we will look at with interest. Fundamentally, however, following substantial debate on the issue, we must look at the official figures on results.

Mr. Gibb: Does the right hon. Gentleman accept the point made by Professor Timms that children are being taught to take tests, and that there is no underlying improvement in either numeracy or literacy?

Mr. Clarke: I do not accept that. There was initially a lot of controversy about the core literacy and numeracy programmes, which followed the precise line of argument cited by the hon. Gentleman, but most people, including teachers and parents, believe that the literacy and numeracy hour which we initiated has had a major and welcome impact on raising standards in literacy and numeracy in primary schools. That can be derided as

simply urging children to pass tests, but those tests are important. The basic tests in literacy and numeracy for key stage 2 equip children to deal variously with similar tests throughout our lives, and it is important to be able to do them easily. I therefore do not accept Professor Timms's point in this specific instance—those tests are important and it is important that we deal with them. It is also worth pointing out that the number of pupils aged five, six or seven in infant classes over 30 fell in accordance with the standards that we have set.

The issue of standards is at the core of our programme. My watchword is to support teachers' professionalism—it is our job to support them, enabling them to develop and be effective in their schools—by dealing with issues such as behaviour, which the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope) mentioned earlier, and bureaucracy. We must also encourage subject-based professionalism. Developing teamwork both in schools—everyone in a school working together—and between schools and the rest of the community, is also crucial. Most important of all, perhaps, is leadership. We must ensure that we have genuine leadership from every teacher in a school to ensure that children fulfil their aspirations effectively. A central means of achieving that is to extend freedom to schools—freedom to innovate, freedom to work in partnership and freedom from bureaucracy and unnecessary restrictions. I acknowledge that the issue of bureaucracy remains extremely serious and difficult, and I shall make it a personal priority. We must also give schools more freedom from strings attached to funding. I announced the other day that we intend to progress further and shall shortly have a formal consultation on more earned autonomy for schools. Schools of sufficient quality will merit the freedom to tailor the curriculum. In response to an earlier intervention, some schools would value the opportunity to vary their curriculum to make sure that every child in their school is stretched and can develop in the most effective way. Schools may also have freedom to vary terms and conditions for staff and greater financial freedom. In those areas, too, it is important to clarify the Conservatives' position.

The hon. Member for Ashford criticised my proposals when he stated—I quote from *The Daily Telegraph* to confirm that my source is pukka—that I was retaining the power to

"pick and choose which freedoms go to which schools".

The hon. Gentleman has a dilemma in making that point. Is he saying that there should be identical inspection regimes for all schools, from the best to the failing, or does he agree that there should be a light-touch approach, whereby schools that are seen to be doing well have less frequent inspections? Where should that be decided, if not at the centre? Is the hon. Gentleman saying that all schools should have the right to vary the national curriculum, however good, competent and effective they are, or should that right be afforded only to schools that are judged by Ofsted to be at the top level of competence? Should the same apply to financial freedoms? When the hon. Gentleman says that he opposes our proposals for greater earned autonomy and greater freedoms for schools, he has an obligation to set out clearly what he intends to do.

We are helped further still by the Conservative party conference to understand the party's views of some of the issues relating to schools. This forms the subject of my fourth request. The document entitled "Leadership with a Purpose" issued at the Conservative party conference stated:

"All pupils should be entitled to a State Scholarship which offers them a chance of an excellent education in a school that has independence from government . . . Our"—

that is, the Conservatives'—

"first priority will be the areas where most children are left behind—our inner cities."

That would effectively bring back the assisted places scheme. It suggests that that is the way to deal with the issues in the inner cities.

We, by contrast, have a strong programme for children in our inner cities. Almost 80 per cent. of the excellence in cities areas have improved on their 2001 GCSE results, with spectacular success stories—including Tower Hamlets, up by 7.2 per cent., Wandsworth up by 5.7 per cent., Redcar and Cleveland up by 5.2 per cent., and so on. With our commitment to excellence in cities and the investment and reform that have gone into that—as opposed to the Conservatives' proposal for a renewed assisted places scheme—I believe that as regards policies for the inner cities, we will be in a much stronger position by a long way. However, I may have misunderstood the hon. Gentleman's policies. Perhaps he will be good enough to explain them to us later.

In the area of further education and skills, there is an even greater need for investment and reform than in the other areas that I have mentioned. For too long, further education has been the Cinderella of our education services, and our national lack of competitiveness in skills, compared with many other countries—particularly the United States and important European allies such as France and Germany—has been a major problem. We are focusing strongly on that area.

Mr. Roy Beggs (East Antrim): Would the Secretary of State consider allocating specific funds to universities and further and higher education to target primary and secondary schools where there is no history of pupils going forward into further and higher education?

Mr. Clarke: The short answer is yes. The hon. Gentleman's proposals are constructive. We already have a programme for summer schools for children from secondary, not primary, schools in the areas that he describes, to ensure that children who have the talent to go to university understand what it means and are not inhibited by their fears. If the hon. Gentleman's comment is that we could do more and better in that regard, I accept the challenge and agree with the thrust of his argument. We will be examining that matter.

The journey of reform in further education and skills entails putting teacher training and learning at the heart of what we do; ensuring that we get better employer engagement, which is a serious weakness at present; reducing bureaucracy—I am sorry to say that again, but there are too many programmes and inspection regimes, which we must sort out; and introducing a coherent qualifications framework. We need to achieve a situation that will allow us to make progress.

On universities, the Gracious Speech stated:

"University reform proposals will be published to improve access and build on excellence."

[Mr. Clarke]

I cannot improve on the admirable quality of the sentiments expressed there. That is exactly what we shall do. An early decision that I took was to delay for five or six weeks over the Christmas break the proposals on which the Minister for Lifelong Learning and Higher Education has been working, which were to have been published in the next two to three weeks. They will be published in mid-January. I decided to delay publication for the selfish reason that I wanted to be sure that I would have a chance to read the material thoroughly and understand the issues fully. I wish to express publicly my appreciation to my hon. Friend and to leaders of the university world, who have been very understanding of the delay in the process.

Mr. Willis: Before the Secretary of State moves on, would he correct the comment that was made by the Minister for Lifelong Learning and Higher Education on the "Today" programme on Radio 4 this morning about the increased resources going into higher education? Will he confirm that from 1997 to the present, there has, in student per capita figures, been no increase? Indeed, if one takes away the income from tuition fees, there has been a decrease in real terms.

Mr. Clarke: Not only will I not correct my hon. Friend's statement, I will confirm it. The overall figure shows a significant increase—I do not have the percentage figure in front of me—in the total resource that has gone to universities. The hon. Gentleman is right to say that funding per student has gone only slightly ahead of being steady; it has gone relatively flat. That is one of the central issues that must be addressed.

The hon. Gentleman has identified the key point, and I am glad that he has. I am prepared to acknowledge directly that there are serious funding shortages in higher education. The question that we must now debate is how we go about dealing with that situation. There are many issues relating to those who could potentially contribute, ranging from individuals, by various means, to society as a whole, the state in various ways, and a range of organisations. We need, and my hon. Friend's document will offer, a proper discussion of possible approaches to the problem.

We made manifesto commitments to

"Strengthen research and teaching excellence"

and to

"Support world-class research and the development of public-private partnerships."

That cannot be done without resource, and there is no doubt that the competitive resource situation of some of our great universities, compared with other universities, is serious. A second goal of our manifesto was that 50 per cent. of young people should enter higher education, and a third was not to introduce top-up fees. Those three are commitments that stand, and that is the context in which we shall publish our proposals.

Mr. Tony McWalter (Hemel Hempstead): Does my right hon. Friend accept that some of us heard with alarm this morning the claim made by the Minister for Lifelong Learning and Higher Education, to the effect that graduates earn a great deal more than non-graduates? The comparison should not be between graduates and non-graduates. It should be between graduates and those who could have gone to university and chose not to. That differential is far lower than the graduate/non-graduate differential. I sincerely hope that my right hon. Friend is not planning to introduce a graduate tax, which would further disincentivise people from going to university.

Mr. Clarke: I am grateful for my hon. Friend's views. It is clear beyond peradventure that graduates earn more than people who have not graduated. I accept that there is a subset of people who have not gone to university because they did not wish to do so, for whatever reason, and the differential between graduates and that subset may be different. I have not seen research on that, but I understand my hon. Friend's point. However, it is difficult to argue against the general proposition that a graduate gains financially from having gone to university. The question whether graduates should therefore make a contribution is an issue. If they were to make such a contribution, the question how it would be best made—via some kind of graduate tax, fees or whatever—is a further issue that needs to be discussed. Those are the issues that will be addressed in the paper that my hon. Friend the Minister for Lifelong Learning and Higher Education is preparing. I do not think that my hon. Friend the Member for Hemel Hempstead (Mr. McWalter) was trying to do this, but to suggest that there is no economic benefit to the individual from having gone to university is, in my opinion, a difficult argument to sustain. It is one of the issues that we will explore in the document. We will publish the document, and I am sure that we will have a good debate on that question when we consider it in detail.

Underlying all the reform throughout every part of education is the question of the investment and resources to which we commit ourselves, and we have made a substantial commitment to improved investment and resources. But the Conservative party has not made such a commitment. For example, about a year ago the Leader of the Opposition said:

"I do recall John Major had a figure in his head of around 35 per cent."—

this is of GDP spent on public services—

"These are aspirations. What you try to say is, every nation that is successful tends to be lower tax."

More recently, last July, I think addressing the journalists, the right hon. Gentleman said:

"you cannot say that I am committed to matching anything. We will match what we require as spending to deliver our reform and change programme."

At the Conservative party conference this year, the Tory policy document stated:

"Conservatives do not support the tax and spending increases the Government has announced."

That is clear.

More recently than that, on 7 October, on the BBC's "Breakfast" programme, the hon. Member for Ashford said:

"I don't criticise the amount of money the government spends on education."

Where does the truth lie? Has the hon. Gentleman caved in completely and betrayed the education interests in relation to his shadow Cabinet colleagues who do not

want such spending, or will his writ run? If education spending is to be cut, what will be cut? We have already identified one example, sure start, but I could have picked a raft of examples.

In the spirit of sharing different policies, the country needs clarity from the Conservative party about exactly what it intends on the funding issue. I do not put that in any spirit of partisanship. That is not the kind of politician I am. To help the public debate, I simply inquire what the policies are and what the situation is.

The debate on the Queen's Speech is an opportunity to compare and look at the different programmes and policies of the parties so that the country can understand them. I have put six questions today to the Conservatives. First, how will the hon. Gentleman deal with the statutory basis of home-school contracts? Secondly, would he close 80 sure start programmes? Thirdly, does he agree with his leader when he says that A-levels are not worth the paper they are written on? *[Interruption.]* I am sure that if he did not say it, the hon. Gentleman will tell us in a second. Fourthly, is he in favour of light-touch inspections and different inspection regimes for different schools according to how effective they are? Fifthly, is it true that he wants to bring back the assisted places scheme as a way of dealing with inner-city educational deprivation? Sixthly, will the Opposition invest in education or not? Those are six quite serious questions and I hope that the hon. Gentleman will do us the courtesy of responding.

I throw down the same challenge to the Liberal Democrats. First, will the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough oppose the truancy legislation when it comes around? Secondly, will he abandon targets and standards for schools set by a national regime such as Ofsted? What is his position on that? Does he believe that every school should just get on with it, with no national regime? Thirdly, will he end the specialist schools programme? We had a short exchange on that, which threw some light on the matter, but a little more light would be helpful. Fourthly, to return to the resources point, does what he says about devolving all responsibility for schools to local authorities mean that he will end the focus that we have tried to establish on the most deprived areas of Britain, because the big issue with his policy is that it takes away the equity element in what any Government naturally try to do?

Those are my six questions to the Conservatives and my four questions to the Liberal Democrats. For our part, the Government have a coherent and constructive programme that is rigorously focused on raising educational standards at every level. That means focusing on what our education service can do for every individual in our society. The way to go about that is by investing in our service and reforming it, by building partnerships within our education service, and between the education service and our colleagues in other areas, such as those that are the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport.

We are always single minded in our focus on standards. We think that the lack of confidence that arises from a lack of such focus is damaging and dangerous, so whatever happens, we shall focus on standards throughout. It is an approach that I am proud to inherit from my predecessor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Yardley, and I commend it to the House.

10.14 am

Mr. Damian Green (Ashford): The House should take this opportunity formally to welcome the new Secretary of State to his position, as this is the first time that we have heard his views on education in his new role. He was appointed just before the last Education questions and I said then that his silence was uncharacteristic. I am glad to see that I was right. I start by expressing my genuine sympathy that the first response of some of the crueller newspapers to his appointment was to dig up pictures of the right hon. Gentleman from when he was president of the National Union of Students in the 1970s, the decade that style forgot. Given the sheer volume of hair on display in some of those pictures, he will be relieved to know that I do not propose to follow the example of his hon. Friend the Member for Bethnal Green and Bow (Ms King) and flourish to the House a picture of a rather impressive silver-backed gorilla. Comparisons in this case would be not just odious but alarming. I congratulate the right hon. Gentleman. Along with age, wisdom, maturity and seniority, he has clearly developed much greater control over his facial hair in the intervening decades.

Like the Secretary of State I shall leave the legislation of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport to my hon. Friend the Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford (Mr. Whittingdale), who will be replying to the debate. As someone who for a time ran a think tank devoted to media matters, I think that involves some heroic restraint on my part, as I have strong views on such issues. However, I do not wish to tread on my hon. Friend's toes.

I was interested that in his opening speech the Secretary of State clearly preferred talking about the plans and policies of the Opposition, and even the Liberal Democrats. Those were certainly the parts of his speech where he showed the greatest enthusiasm. He is understandably embarrassed about the policies that he has inherited and has had to take over. Even in a debate on the Queen's Speech where the Government are setting out their programme for the year, he preferred to talk about anything but those things.

The embarrassment that the right hon. Gentleman feels has been revealed in the large number of interviews that he has been giving, which show with commendable honesty that the new Secretary of State is prepared to confront, at least in words, the legacy of failure that he has been left by his predecessors. As he told *The Daily Telegraph*—I am glad that we read the same newspapers—

"the central prescription of Labour's first years of office would give way to a new approach."

It is rather refreshing if he is to continue in that vein. If those words mean anything in practice, we on the Opposition Benches will welcome that long overdue conversion. I can assure the Secretary of State that he will receive support from me if and when he genuinely takes powers away from himself and gives them to parents, heads, teachers and governors.

The central proposition that informs the policies that the Opposition have laid out so far and which will be the bedrock of the many other policies that will develop in

[Mr. Damian Green]

the years ahead is trust—trust in schools to manage their own budgets, trust in heads and governors to set high standards of discipline, and trust in parents to choose the best education for their children. That is in stark contrast to the Government's approach so far, which has been characterised by central control, micro-management, daily, sometimes hourly, interference in the working lives of teachers, and a desire to dictate to parents what type of education their children should receive.

Mr. Barry Gardiner (Brent, North): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Green: I shall give way in a moment.

The Government's idea of choice is to allow parents to choose between a small range of options which Ministers allow them. It is unfortunate that, despite the Secretary of State's words in newspaper interviews, nothing that he has said this morning convinced the House that he is prepared to give up that degree of control, but I am sure that we can live in hope.

It is traditional that the hon. Member for Brent, North (Mr. Gardiner) makes the first intervention on Opposition speakers and I am always happy to observe parliamentary tradition.

Mr. Gardiner: I am most grateful to the hon. Gentleman. Given his remarks about devolving power over local school budgets to local heads, does he commend the fact that, in the past five years, the proportion of local budgets that are devolved and under the control of head teachers has risen from 79 to 87 per cent.? What is his target percentage for devolution of those budgets? Will he also confirm that he would continue with the direct grants to each primary and secondary school that this Government have piloted and which have been so welcomed by head teachers?

Mr. Green: I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on making a rather more serious intervention than he usually manages in his jack-in-the-box performances. The problem with the way in which the Government have funded schools relates to the small packets of directed money. Like hon. Members in all parts of the House, he will have talked to head teachers in his constituency and will be aware of their frustration and irritation about the amount of paperwork and the sheer amount of time that is taken in bidding for the grants. I shall deal with the Opposition's proposals later, as I intend to address directly some of the questions asked by the Secretary of State in an attempt to avoid speaking about his own policies.

The hon. Member for Brent, North will know that 79 different funding streams can currently be accessed by schools. That is nonsense and I suspect that the Secretary of State knows that. He says that he wants to reduce that number and, inasmuch as he can do so, I will welcome any steps that he takes. However, if the hon. Gentleman thinks that schools feel that they have more control over the money that comes from the Government than 10 years ago, he is simply mistaken. That is not the day-to-day experience of head teachers in this country.

The Gracious Speech made relatively few mentions of education. The Government promised to

"bring forward proposals to tackle problems of truancy".

The Secretary of State referred to some of those proposals, and the Opposition would heartily support any effective moves to reduce truancy. I am sure that nobody in the House disagrees with the view that truancy not only blights the opportunities of the children who are truanting, but far too often leads to the antisocial behaviour that affects many of our communities. I am also sure that he is aware of the promise made by his Government in 1998 to reduce school truancies by one third. However, he will know that his Department released in September figures showing that the Government had completely failed to make any headway on reducing truancy, despite, according to the Department's website, the issuing of 75 press releases since 1997 announcing measures to tackle truancy. The fact that there have been 75 press releases and no progress is a snapshot of new Labour's attitude to government.

That is what the Government have achieved despite forcing LEAs to write behaviour support plans and establishing a ministerial task force to tackle truancy, and despite everything else that they have been saying for the past six months. They have announced more money and proposed taking child benefit away from parents of persistent truants—a policy that I understand was launched and then dropped, in characteristic fashion. They have called for police in schools, carried out truancy sweeps and announced fast-track prosecution for parents of truants, leading to fines or even imprisonment. Some of those proposals have been announced and implemented, some announced and forgotten and some announced and withdrawn.

I therefore hope that the Secretary of State will forgive those of us who are mildly sceptical about the Government's performance in that regard for saying that we have heard a lot of what he said before. Any proposals that he makes must be seen in the context of his Government's failure to do anything effective about the problem, which is clear on the basis of their own figures, and despite their suffering from a severe case of "initiative-itis", to quote the Secretary of State himself.

Despite all the tough-sounding policies, truancy is as high as ever. The Secretary of State quoted Stephen Clarke of Truancy Call, who estimates that 50,000 children play truant from school every day. When Mike Tomlinson was running Ofsted, he estimated that the system had lost about 10,000 all together. Those 10,000 children are being denied their opportunity in life, and another series of tough-sounding but ultimately hollow gimmicks will do nothing to provide them with the chance in life that they deserve.

The Secretary of State will know that the problem is not only one of education, but of affecting everyone in society. Forty per cent. of street crime, 25 per cent. of burglaries, 20 per cent. of criminal damage and a third of car thefts are carried out by 10 to 16-year-olds at times when they should be in school. Those are genuinely terrible figures. If the Government want to get tough on antisocial behaviour, they must crack down on truancy and not merely dig up new schemes to announce or reannounce.

The final resort of this Government is to attempt to blame the Opposition. Indeed, there has been an interesting development in the past few days in their attempts to blame the Opposition for their own failures. On Wednesday, the Prime Minister said that we proposed to close down sure start all together. The Secretary of State is already retreating hard from that position, however, and was talking about closing down some sure start schemes. I thought that I would elevate the tone of the debate, which the Government have tried to drag down, by quoting from the section on sure start in our document "The Conveyor Belt to Crime". I looked it up after the Prime Minister made that extraordinary—and indeed false—claim on Wednesday. It states:

"In adopting this approach, we have carefully considered the extent to which any of this programme is being offered through the Government's Sure Start programme."

There is no argument between us about the possibilities of sure start. The document continues:

"It is at present difficult to make an assessment of Sure Start's effectiveness, as no independent evaluation has yet taken place."

I hope that the Secretary of State would not disagree that it would be good to have an independent evaluation; if the scheme works, one would want it to continue, like all effective policies. The document goes on to state:

"But it is clear that the programmes offered are not focused on the reduction of disruptive and delinquent behaviour. There have also been difficulties in Sure Start in the relationship between the programme and existing local schemes; moreover, there has been a perception that programme managers are intruding in an unwelcome way into the work of voluntary organisations."

I hope that the Government will see from that excerpt that we seek to improve and build on sure start. That was the point made in "The Conveyor Belt to Crime". We will happily carry on with the parts that work, but we will not carry on with those that do not. That is an entirely adult and intelligent approach for an Opposition to take to policy making, and we will continue to take it. I hope that the Government can approach the vital social problem of truancy in the same mature way.

We need such programmes to cope with the problem of truancy in the short term, but I hope that the Secretary of State would admit that the long-term solution that needs to be added to the mix is the establishment of a much better vocational system. For too long in the UK—this is not a criticism of the current Government, as the situation has continued for decades and possibly since the second world war—less academic children have not been given the chances that they deserve in our system. Many of them have become disillusioned with education, started to play truant and turned to crime.

Mr. McWalter: Is the hon. Gentleman saying that some parts of the sure start programme do not work and hence that he would withdraw them?

Mr. Green: I do not want to repeat myself, as I am aware that many hon. Members wish to speak. I just quoted from a document that I will happily send to the hon. Gentleman, which made the point that we want more evaluation and that some parts of the scheme seem to be working, while others do not. If he is saying that it is absolutely perfect and should not be changed in any way, that is fine and it is a point of view, but it is not the experience of those who are dealing with the problem on the ground. We know that many less academic children become disillusioned with education, start to play truant and turn to crime. Until we begin to reverse the chronic deficit in skills training that leaves too many children disengaged, truancy will continue to blight our children and their communities.

On secondary school reform, this promise was made in the Gracious Speech:

"Secondary school reform will continue to promote opportunity and choice through greater diversity for parents and pupils."

The Secretary of State made much play of his desire for greater autonomy and freedom to innovate for schools. I am sure that he means it, but in that case, it is a shame for him that the Government's legislative agenda does not contain an education Bill through which he could bring about the necessary reforms that our schools desperately need. Instead, he is forced to work within the boundaries of the restricted and centralising powers that the Education Act 2002 grants him.

The Secretary of State claims that the powers of earned autonomy to which he referred mean that the Department

"is trusting some of our best head teachers to take decisions in relation to their own schools without our having to sanction them."

That is interesting because it highlights the inconsistency at the heart of the idea. It is simply untrue that the Secretary of State will not have to sanction decisions, because to earn autonomy, a school will have to persuade him that it is worthy of it. Freedom sanctioned from the centre for a fixed time with Government ability to remove it is not freedom. That is not the only contradiction, however.

Earned autonomy presumably rests on the assumption that autonomy is a good thing. If autonomy benefits schools, surely those that are failing in the current system need it most, not those that live and thrive despite the restrictions. Earned autonomy is an oxymoron; it is classic new Labour double-speak.

Another phrase that the Government like runs it close: "the power to innovate." The Secretary of State said:

"The 'Power to Innovate' is one of the most radical and far reaching powers available to Government—it enables me as Secretary of State to exempt education legislation that is standing in the way of common sense and in the way of schools wanting to innovate and to achieve the very best for their children in care."

That is an extraordinary admission from a Secretary of State. He admits that the initiatives and controls that the Government have introduced stand in the way of common sense and prevent schools from innovating. All he can do to help schools to innovate is to suspend the Government's legislation.

Sadly, the former Secretary of State is not present to join the debate. I should love to hear her defend the legislation that she introduced and which, according to the Secretary of State, requires suspension in order to help schools. There is severe confusion at the heart of Government about whether their legislation is helpful or harmful. I want to help the Secretary of State: it is generally harmful. If he intends to argue through

[Mr. Green]

Cabinet Committees for another Bill to remove many provisions of last year's Act, we would welcome that. The solution is simple: get rid of the controls, not only for some but for all schools.

Whatever the Government say, they simply cannot let go. Why else would they issue a document to schools entitled "Power to Innovate: Guidance for applicants"? It consists of eight pages that tell schools how to have good ideas. Producing documents from Whitehall Departments is not the way in which to promote innovation; allowing schools freedom to innovate sensitively to suit their local conditions is the best method.

Mr. Charles Clarke: The hon. Gentleman provides an absence of clarification. Which controls does he believe should be abolished: the national curriculum, the Ofsted inspection regime, the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority?

Mr. Green: The national curriculum has become too wide.

Mr. Clarke: Should it be abolished?

Mr. Green: Not altogether. The Secretary of State and his officials have clearly pored over my party conference speech, for which I am grateful. Attention to the classics is always welcome. He knows that I suggested that the national curriculum has become too wide and that the statutory, compulsory introduction of citizenship was one of the minor idiocies that the Government inflicted on schools in the past year. Again, good schools introduced and promoted citizenship in different ways to relate to local conditions, but the Government used a sledgehammer and insisted that it should form part of the national curriculum.

Other subjects have had to be dropped.

Mr. Clarke: Would the hon. Gentleman abolish it?

Mr. Green: I would abolish the compulsory nature of citizenship classes. *[Interruption.]* Those who chatter on the Government Front Bench do not realise that when another subject is added to the curriculum, something has to be dropped. I have been to schools where they have discussed what to take out. It could, for example, be a careers lesson. In some cases, it was an information and communications technology lesson. Schools and pupils find such lessons useful and valuable. The Government do not acknowledge that, when they decide to include new compulsory subjects in the curriculum, useful subjects have to be removed.

Schools, not Ministers and officials, know how best to teach citizenship. That is at the heart of the difference between us. We are having an interesting passage of parliamentary exchange, which shows that the Government and the new Secretary of State have not got the point. They continue to believe that they know better than heads, teachers, parents and governors the way in which to run our schools. It appears that there will be no change in our school system.

Mr. Kevan Jones (North Durham): The hon. Gentleman argues that schools should be free and given total autonomy. Under what circumstances should the Government intervene in a school when problems arise? Secondly, my memory is perhaps weak, but did not a Conservative Government introduce the national curriculum?

Mr. Green: Yes, and it was a good idea. I am glad that the new Government in 1997 did not dispense with the curriculum, Ofsted or tests. The Conservative Government introduced important reforms in the 1980s and 1990s. I am glad that the Government continued with them. However, they have added huge control mechanisms to them, and that has led to demoralisation in the teaching profession.

I am grateful to the hon. Member for North Durham (Mr. Jones) because he leads me to my next point. The micro-management that I have described is symptomatic of the Government's approach. In the past year, the Department for Education and Skills issued 275 documents to schools. That is 17 pages of paperwork for each working day. The Secretary of State recently said:

> "Bureaucracy and the seemingly endless flow of documentation from Government agencies . . . can be a serious barrier to high quality teacher professionalism and I acknowledge that it is my job to put a stop to it and allow you—

that is, teachers—

> "to do your job".

That is another honest admission of the Government's failure, and we welcome it. I regret to tell the right hon. Gentleman that nothing much appears to be improving.

In September, the first month of the school term, the Department issued 27 documents to schools. That is more than one a working day. There is therefore no let-up in the flow of unnecessary paperwork from the Department. I hope that the Secretary of State listened to the speech of my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr. Duncan Smith) on Wednesday. He went through the Department's solution to paperwork: more paperwork, including "Good Practice in Cutting Bureaucracy Volume One"; "Good Practice in Cutting Bureaucracy Volume Two", and the wonderful "Bureaucracy Cutting Toolkit".

If the Secretary of State wants ideas about cutting Whitehall paperwork that ties up 20 per cent. of teachers' time, driving them from the profession, he should begin by reading the "Bureaucracy Cutting Toolkit". Along with thousands of teachers, I have read it. Among the helpful advice in section 4 about the way in which teachers can cut bureaucracy is, "Stop doing things". I am sure that that is tremendously helpful to teachers. Perhaps the Secretary of State could take his own advice. He could also benefit from reading section 2, which suggests, "Get started". I am sure that schools find that helpful, too. They should stop doing unnecessary things and start stopping doing them. I suspect that many teachers had worked that out for themselves, but the Department clearly has not.

Mr. Colin Pickthall (West Lancashire): Most good head teachers and teachers throw all that stuff straight in the bin.

Mr. Green: I cannot improve on that criticism of the Government's approach to policy. I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, and wish him well when he next sees his Whip.

It is not just our schools that need help; our universities need help too. I am desolate that the Minister for Lifelong Learning and Higher Education is no longer in her place, because I have read with fascination and close interest her interview in *The Guardian* this morning, just to show that I am catholic in my appreciation of the national press; it is not only *The Daily Telegraph* that I read. She admits that universities are in crisis, so it is a shame that she has left the Chamber, as that prevents her from apologising to the House, and to Britain's universities, for the crisis that her Government have brought about in five years.

Like other hon. Members, I heard the hon. Lady on the radio this morning, attempting to explain away the crisis, and not a hint of apology emerged. However, I am sure that if she rejoins the debate, she will take the opportunity to apologise. I was fascinated particularly by her question:

"Do people understand the extent to which universities are in crisis?"

It does not appear that the Government understand it, because the Gracious Speech says:

"University reform proposals will be published to improve access and build on excellence."

That is not the portrait that the Minister painted in this morning's interview.

The Secretary of State asked me a number of questions; perhaps I may ask him just one. Will he confirm that the right hon. Member for Tyneside, North (Mr. Byers) is acting in his new official capacity of Government kite flyer in chief when he suggests a £3,000 cap on tuition fees? Although the Secretary of State has delayed yet again the publication of the university funding White Paper, the Government have floated the idea that tuition fees might go up to £10,000. We understand from the right hon. Member for Tyneside, North, however, that they will be £3,000. That sounds to me like a debate going on inside the Cabinet. The House would be thrilled if the Secretary of State enlightened us about that, although he appears unwilling to do so.

Mr. Clarke: I did not respond because the hon. Gentleman's allegation is such nonsense. My very good friend who represents Tyneside, North and I have had many conversations over the years, but never once have we discussed university top-up fees. Perhaps we should have, but we have not. My right hon. Friend argues his own policies in his own speeches in his own way and from own his point of view, in what I hope is a national debate in which everyone will get involved. The suggestion that my right hon. Friend is flying a kite for someone is completely and utterly wrong—but I did not want to dignify the hon. Gentleman's remarks with a response until he goaded me perhaps a little too much.

Mr. Green: History will judge, when we see the effects of the White Paper. At least we know that it will be published this Session. One of the things on which I ought to congratulate the Secretary of State is making a commitment on the Floor of the House that the White Paper will be published in January—although, like the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis), I seem to remember that the last time the House discussed education we were promised that it would be published in November. I hope that the Secretary of State improves on his predecessor's performance in that regard.

We welcome the fact that the proposals will be introduced, not least because families as well as universities have been waiting far too long to find out when to start their financial planning for the top-up fees—it seems that the Government certainly have planned for them. It is worth reminding ourselves of how they got into this mess, and their manifesto pledge is unambiguous:

"We will not introduce 'top-up' fees and have legislated to prevent them."

Members of the House, and the public outside, have witnessed the Prime Minister failing to rule out top-up fees on two separate occasions.

The Government appear unwilling to accept that the problem is as least partly of their own making. The Secretary of State said how proud he was of the target of 50 per cent. of 18 to 30-year-olds going into higher education, but he knows perfectly well that that is one of the targets that is imposing greater financial pressures on universities, and also that the Government's apparent ruling out of top-up fees has left them with nowhere else to go to raise the money. So, if the Government are to find a solution to the problem, they must sacrifice one of the manifesto pledges that the Secretary of State proudly read out.

Given that the Government misled the public over the original introduction of tuition fees, which they ruled out before the 1997 election and then introduced three months after it, I can understand why the Secretary of State is sensitive about breaking another higher education promise. I suggest to him that one way out of the problem would be to admit that it is wrong to fix an arbitrary target for higher education participation.

I commend two stark figures to the Secretary of State. In the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development rankings for the proportion of people who complete a first degree, Britain is second. By any objective standard, there is no crisis in the number of people who go through first degrees. Indeed, I recently received an answer from the Minister for Lifelong Learning and Higher Education to written question 78381 that convinced me even more that the point is entirely valid. I managed to tease out from her what the Department's target on increasing participation in higher education means. It is

"measured by the number of first time entrants to higher education . . . as a proportion of the relevant population."

The measure is not the number of people who get degrees and benefit from them, but simply the number of people who start degrees.

The Secretary of State knows that the drop-out rate in some universities is getting as high as 40 per cent. Some of his speech at least was serious and reasonable, so, in his serious and reasonable mode, he will surely acknowledge that the measure of higher education's effectiveness is those who complete courses, not simply those who sign up to them. For instance, he will be aware that in continental European countries the entry rate is about 50 per cent., and a huge proportion drop out after the first year. If the Government are to measure their own success by promoting such a system, I suggest that they will not benefit young people. In particular, they will not benefit the young people whom they say

[Mr. Green]

they want to benefit—those who come from backgrounds where it is not traditional to go to university.

Mr. Willis: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for raising that crucial issue. Does he agree that not all the students who appear in the figures as dropping out actually do drop out, because some move to another degree course? Under the Government's proposals, however, they would be counted twice. Does he accept that we need a comprehensive and cogent way to track young people, particularly after the age of 18, so that we can produce realistic statistics that we can all use as a starting point for debating the issue?

Mr. Green: An alarming degree of consensus is emerging. I agree with the hon. Gentleman, but neither of us should be surprised that an element of double counting is coming into the Government's education statistics. We have seen it everywhere else, so it is no surprise that we are seeing it in the higher education participation ratings.

I have referred to one international comparison, and I want to refer to another, which should be at the heart of the Government's education policy: Britain is bottom of the OECD league for the participation of 16 to 18-year-olds in further education and training. There is a genuine numbers crisis there, yet the Government are chasing the wrong figure. Of course we all want to widen participation and access to education. That is yet another issue on which there is no division between the two sides of the House. I have already acknowledged that the problem is not peculiar to the Government—it did not start in 1997, but goes back many decades—but their solution of shoehorning into university young people who may not benefit from it is not the right one.

We have debated the benefits to young people of becoming graduates in terms of employability, and I commend to the Secretary of State the most recent edition of "Graduate Review", which is produced by VT Careers Management and published jointly with *The Guardian*—I should be on a retainer from *The Guardian* this morning. The point, which is counter-intuitive, at least according to the Government's thinking, is this:

"Recent history has revealed a labour market where many employers have tended to recruit graduates on the level of their degree and their university ... this is not what employers are currently saying. In a survey ... 40 per cent. of graduate recruiters felt that degrees had become devalued as a means of measuring employability.

44 per cent. thought that graduates did not necessarily make better employees than non-graduates. Only 17 per cent. thought graduates better equipped for the workplace than non-graduates.

70 per cent. claimed that degree results were not the best measure of employability."

I acknowledge that that is just one survey, but quite a lot of anecdotal evidence appears to confirm that what the Government seek to do will con young people into thinking that the historic figures for graduates' increased employability and earning power will continue, whatever the percentage of graduates. The survey shows the first signs of that relationship breaking down, and I urge the Government to think seriously about this issue.

There is a real crisis, which the Government have not yet addressed. I am not sure whether the Secretary of State mentioned the 14-19 Green Paper—I apologise if he did. If he did mention it, he certainly glossed over it quickly, whereas it requires a huge amount of attention and a genuine national debate. Last year the number of level 2 and level 3 qualifications—the sub-degree qualifications—that were awarded in vocational topics dropped by more than 40 per cent., and the Learning and Skills Development Agency estimates that the proportion of poor or unsatisfactory grades in work-based learning has nearly tripled since 1998. Those are genuine crisis figures, which the Government should address.

Although the Queen's Speech touched on some of the problems that the Government face, it missed an opportunity to deal with many other problems faced by our schools and colleges today. We look forward to the publication of Mike Tomlinson's final report on the A-level crisis, but everyone is entitled to ask why the situation was allowed to arise. We have had another flurry today from Mr. Porkess and it is clear that the aftershocks of this summer's A-level crisis will be with us for some time to come. I hope that we do not hear again from the Government that the crisis surrounding A-levels, which threw the futures of hundreds of thousands of young people into doubt and wrecked confidence in the exam system, would never have happened had we stopped criticising the system. If the Secretary of State goes down that line, he will cheapen the debate on this vital area. Scrutiny is our job in opposition, and we make no apologies for exposing the incompetence perpetrated by the Government.

The Secretary of State is right when he says that he has to ensure that public confidence in the integrity and quality of our public examinations is maintained and strengthened, and we trust that he will keep to his promise to implement the Tomlinson recommendations.

I also hope that the Secretary of State will deal effectively with another crisis that was not mentioned in the Queen's Speech: the discipline crisis. A recent survey by the NASUWT showed that in one school in Wales, a year 10 pupil who had been excluded on five different occasions for violence and vandalism set fire to the school toilets and was permanently excluded by the school. His exclusion was overturned by an independent appeals panel, which held that the arson was not deliberate, despite a police caution given to the pupil. It also showed that a year 8 pupil in a school in the north-east, who had a lengthy record of disruptive behaviour, including bullying and assaulting other pupils, was understandably permanently excluded after hitting a teacher on the head. An independent appeals panel has overturned that exclusion as well. As the Secretary of State knows, there are many such cases.

It is not surprising that those disciplinary problems help to drive teachers out of the profession. The Secretary of State will acknowledge in his honest moments that teacher morale is at an all-time low. Perhaps surprisingly, according to the National Union of Teachers—I shall spread my favours around the teaching unions this morning—pay is not even one of the top three reasons for teachers leaving the profession. The three top reasons are workload, pupil behaviour and Government initiatives—all problems of the

Government's own making. The Secretary of State has told teachers, "It's our job in government to support you and your profession. It is not for us to tell you how to teach." Having said that, he owes it to teachers and their pupils to heed his words, because without teachers there can be no teaching and learning.

The Secretary of State asked about our policy, and I am always pleased to use the opportunity of debates such as this to advance Conservative policy. As he said, at our party conference we announced a series of education proposals with the common theme of trust. The theme of trust informs all of our proposals. That is what distinguishes us from the Government, for whom the language of trust comes easily but who, in reality, are incapable of trusting heads, teachers and parents.

We believe that our proposals for education reform are a radical and much-needed step towards realising our goal that no child be left behind. Unlike the Government, we believe in trusting schools by devolving budgets to them wherever possible and reducing the paperwork that heads and teachers must submit. School funding has become ever more complicated; it needs to become ever more simple. We will give real autonomy to schools. We will reduce the number of unnecessary documents that heads and teachers have to wade through, because we know that when teachers are trusted to teach, free from the dead hand of central interference, schools flourish. Our experience of city technology colleges proved that. While I am in a generous mood, let me say that I am glad that the Government have continued with that raft of Conservative policy.

We want to trust not only schools but parents. Let me discuss our state scholarship scheme, which the Secretary of State mentioned. The scheme will entitle pupils to be educated at a wider range of schools. It is not simply a reinvention of the assisted places scheme; it will create a new sector of schools, as exists in many other countries. In Holland, the USA and Denmark, parents have a right to found and run new schools if they are not happy with what is on offer. Our scheme will mean that parents will no longer be forced to accept places at schools to which they do not want to send their children. Thus we shall break the cycle of under-achievement into which too many young people still fall.

The state scholarship scheme will break the monopoly link between state funding and state provision, allowing charities, parents and other groups to establish new schools, which would then receive the money from the state—the state scholarship. Virtually every other developed country in the world knows that Governments do not have a monopoly of wisdom on good practice and that real innovation comes through genuine diversity—not in eight-page documents sent from Whitehall.

The Government have argued that the non-state sector is somehow not capable of or willing to provide high-quality education. Let me point out to Government Members that LEAs already spend £250 million a year on special educational needs contracts with non-state providers. Those offer the best care and education to some of our most vulnerable children, and we should not deny all children the opportunity of benefiting from such expertise.

Mr. Gardiner: Can the hon. Gentleman tell the House how his proposals would impact on parents' costs? I understand that the state scholarship would give the cost of what would have been a state education towards the cost of a place at the school envisaged, but has he made any calculation of the differential—the actual cost to parents on top of that scholarship—that parents would then have to pay under his system?

Mr. Green: There would be none, because the schools would provide education at the same cost as that provided by the state. That is how the state scholarship would work.

We would also build trust in an independent exam system by making the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority independent of Government, along the lines of the Bank of England. I hope that the Government will adopt a similar proposal. I take this opportunity again to urge them strongly to do so, and to do so quickly. Of all the crises that the Government could face, the prospect of another A-level crisis next year would be the worst, so measures that can be taken quickly to restore confidence in the examination system are absolutely vital. I hope that if they need to introduce legislation to do that, they will do so, because it is absolutely vital to remove all traces of politics from the exam system. Unless the suspicion that Ministers measure their virtue by the grades is removed, the exam boards, or the QCA, will always be looking over their shoulder at the Secretary of State to see what effect the results will have on the political standing of the Government of the day. Secretaries of State for Education used not to behave in that way, and we need to get back to that position.

We also think that there should be a radical change to the A-level system, which has done more harm than good. The amount of exam time, as opposed to teaching time, has been increased. The Tomlinson inquiry concluded that the Curriculum 2000 A-level reforms, which introduced AS-levels, were an "accident waiting to happen". We all want to broaden the post-16 curriculum, but the current AS-level system is demonstrably not the way to do it.

Finally, and most importantly, we would trust heads to make the right decisions about how to run their schools. We support the Secretary of State's aim of raising standards of leadership in our schools, and he is right to argue that without strong leadership our children will not get the education that they deserve. If he really means what he says about trusting heads, he must allow them to set standards of discipline in their schools. That is why the independent appeals panels should go.

We believe that home-school behaviour contracts are a good idea. The right hon. Gentleman had the honesty to point out that these will be an option for heads. Once again, he asked me to determine what heads should do, and once again I say to him that I would let heads decide. A head knows how best to run discipline in his school, not the Secretary of State—whether that be the right hon. Gentleman, me or anyone else. The fundamental difference between us is that I trust heads, whereas he does not.

Experience shows us that these practical measures will deliver higher standards in our schools. Some schools already operate home-school contracts. I urge the Secretary of State to act on his words, and to grasp the agenda of real reform that we offer. He faces an

[Mr. Green]

enormous challenge. Improving our schools, colleges and universities is a central task for any Government. His task has been made more difficult because for five years, under his two predecessors, the doctrine of centralisation has reigned supreme. He says that he wants to do a U-turn and adopt the more decentralised and diverse system that we advocate. I wish him well in attempting to turn his back on five years of new Labour dogma on education. We will judge him on the results. Even more importantly, students, parents, teachers and governors will know whether they have been given the freedoms that will promote excellence and opportunity for all. Our policies would ensure that no child was left behind in our education system. If the Government's policies fail in that regard, they will be judged harshly, and they will deserve it.

11.3 am

Mr. Colin Pickthall (West Lancashire): I congratulate the new Secretary of State, with whom I worked when he was a Minister at the Home Office. I know that he will be a first-class Secretary of State, and I hope that he will listen carefully to what I have to say and will act on some of it. I welcome and agree with almost everything that he said. I admire his cheek in writing the speeches of the spokesmen for the two Opposition parties, which takes some doing.

I want to concentrate on the paragraph in the Queen's Speech that includes the statement:

"Secondary school reform will continue to promote opportunity and choice through greater diversity for parents and pupils. University reform proposals will be published".

I shall give an example from my constituency of what is going on in secondary education. I should declare a sort of interest in that my wife is the head teacher of a comprehensive school in Skelmersdale, where I live. It is a town of 42,000 people and has some of the most disadvantaged wards in the country. It has excellent primary schools, all of which have benefited immensely from Government investment and targets over the past four or five years. It has an excellent sure start programme that is working exceedingly well. If the Opposition think that they could propose the removal of any or part of that scheme with electoral impunity, they have another think coming.

Skelmersdale has three excellent comprehensive schools, which have made major advances in the past few years. This year, for the first time, all three schools obtained more than 30 per cent. A to C grades at GCSE. That sounds modest compared with many other schools, even those in much more fortunate areas in my constituency outside Skelmersdale. Those areas have for many years creamed off the children from the most aspiring families in Skelmersdale, so we already have a self-selection system. In the true context of Skelmersdale and its history, the percentages gained by Glenburn, Our Lady Queen of Peace and Lathom high schools are truly remarkable, and they will be improved upon next year. In their continued efforts to compete with schools in the leafier parts of Lancashire, those three schools are applying for sports college status, technology college status and engineering college status respectively.

The entire staff and head teacher of two schools I know of, which are not in my constituency, have spent more than a year working to raise the £50,000 necessary to apply for such status by holding jumble sales, dances and other such activities, because there are no firms in their area that could easily come up with a large part of that sum. One of the schools in Skelmersdale has been pursuing specialist status for almost two years. The head and senior staff have a rock solid case, and they have put in phenomenal amounts of time and effort in pursuit of that goal, but the school requires £50,000. In a town such as Skelmersdale, it is impossible to raise such a sum of money: it cannot be done. There are no large businesses left that have not already been scraped clean of any charity that they could afford through previous begging bowl efforts.

If it is impossible for one school in the area to raise £50,000, it is even more impossible for three schools to do so. All the comprehensive schools in Skelmersdale are thereby disadvantaged. If it so happens that one of them secures specialist status, it will become more attractive, and it follows as night follows day that that will damage the other two schools in the town.

All three schools currently work well together. They are part of an excellence cluster that is doing wonderful things and has been tremendously successful. I was grateful to my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Estelle Morris) for giving us the chance to develop that cluster. Those schools are destined by Government policy, which is styled as greater diversity for parents and pupils, for continuous struggle and disadvantage in a system that does not intend to be, but in practice is, divisive and discriminatory.

Mr. Kevan Jones: I, too, have two schools in my constituency that are struggling to raise £50,000, and there is no lack of commitment from parents or teachers. Does my hon. Friend agree that it makes dedicated and hard-working teachers feel that they are second best, and leads to low morale?

Mr. Pickthall: I agree with my hon. Friend. I do not detect that it has led to low morale in the schools to which I am referring, but the academic leadership of schools in challenging areas have been diverted into activities on which they should not have to spend more than minimal time.

Mr. McWalter: Has my hon. Friend considered the possibility of the three schools making a joint application, as is happening in my constituency? That avoids such divisiveness, and enables the specialist facilities to be available to all, but to be developed in each of the schools.

Mr. Pickthall: That is an interesting suggestion, which we have discussed. The problem is that one school wants sports-college status because of its outstanding sport record, while another is outstanding in technology. If such a scheme could be organised, however, and the three schools between them had to raise £50,000, it would make a significant difference.

Specialist status, of whatever kind, seems to be a matter of sheer chance. If a successful firm or two in the town can spare some cash a school will succeed in its bid, all other things being equal. Even in Lancashire, there are schools in which a single governor could put up the £50,000 without missing it.

When the schools and I protested to the Department, we were given a list of firms throughout the country that might help. When those firms were canvassed it turned out that none of them could help, because they were already giving help elsewhere. We came up with other ideas for finding the cash, but the Department vetoed all of them.

In his speech on the 10th anniversary of Ofsted, the Secretary of State identified the "fourth freedom"—I welcome all four—as

"more freedom from strings-attached funding".

Why not start with the requirement for £50,000? Why not get rid of that? Why not resurrect what is buried in all our education documents of the past couple of years—the promise that all schools would be able to bid for specialist status? Why not fulfil that promise?

Mr. Willis: It is Liberal Democrat policy.

Mr. Pickthall: So I could be wrong after all.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) recently published an analysis of the process in our schools, and referred to it in connection with the hospital service in his speech yesterday. I agree with every word. The simple truth presented by my right hon. Friend is that if we identify certain schools, give them a special title to make clear their favoured status and give them more resources, ipso facto we damage those that do not acquire that status. We create a two-tier system which will perpetuate itself, and which will inevitably become more and more stark and polarised. If on top of that we make a school's ability to raise private funds a condition for the securing of special status, we compound the injustice by skewing status and funding towards wealthier catchment areas and away from disadvantaged areas.

I referred to a two-tier system, but there are no longer just two tiers. We are told that we will have 2,000 specialist schools and 33 academies—city academies, I assume—by 2006. We will have 60 more training schools each year, extended schools, and advanced schools. It is as if there had been a brainstorming session in the Department. It is as if a crowd of people had come up with some good ideas and thrown them on the table, and no one had bothered to edit them—as if the ideas had been put out and people had said "We will have some of that, and some of that". There are many good things in each of the proposals I have mentioned, but what is being created is not a two-tier system but a series of levels. It is called diversity. I am all in favour of diversity, but if some schools have the advantage at a certain point while others must wait for years, many will disappear, having been gobbled up by the disadvantages created by the new schools with their special funding.

The only argument that the Government have produced to counter the criticisms is that specialist schools are required to work with non-specialist schools and spread the benefits of their resources to the wider community. That is nonsense: it does not bear a moment's examination. The matter is gone into more thoroughly in the description of the advanced schools, in which it is made plain that such schools will have to help the other schools in the community. It is a strange situation: having acquired an advantage that will suck in pupils who would otherwise have gone to other schools, a school will have to go back to the schools it has disadvantaged in order to re-advantage them a little, on the Department's orders.

The impulse behind what I consider to be a profoundly unfair process is summarised by the Government's declaration of the "post-comprehensive era"—which would make sense if only we had ever had a comprehensive era or a comprehensive system. Somehow, in our wonderful British way, we have managed to avoid creating such a system, although at the crucial time it was the policy of all three major parties.

The thinking is based on myths. We read

"We need an end to the 'one size fits all' school and the 'off the shelf comprehensive'."

Where are these places? I do not know of them. Comprehensives are as varied as their staff, their governing bodies, their head teachers, their local education authorities and, most important, the communities around them. There is no such thing as an off-the-shelf comprehensive.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Yardley told us that comprehensives were "too uniform". If all this stuff is true, why do parents all over the country fight tooth and nail to get their kids into one comprehensive rather than another? If the schools are all exactly the same, it does not matter where Johnny goes. Let him choose a school himself, and wander off there.

We were told "This is not selection", because

"only 6 per cent. choose to make use of the flexibility to select on the basis of aptitude for the specialism".

Well, that is 6 per cent. selection for a start. "There is no selection"? Of course there is selection.

I have read carefully the Department's analysis of what is needed in our secondary system. I agree that many comprehensives have failed, as did many grammar schools and many more secondary moderns in their time; but the vast majority of comprehensives succeeded wonderfully, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Yardley has pointed out vigorously.

I rejoice in the vastly improved funding introduced by the Government, the introduction of learning mentors, the increase in the number of classroom assistants—which is destined to continue—and, in particular, the greater flexibility and freedom to tailor the curriculum that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has announced in recent weeks. I commend the creation of excellence clusters, and I hope that during the year the Government will find the energy and the resources to expand the system—and to deal with some anomalies in it.

I detected substantial changes in emphasis in my right hon. Friend's speech on the Ofsted anniversary. I hope he will be robust in resisting some of the weird agendas devised by etiolated wonks in the back of No. 10, or wherever. Above all, I hope that he will think carefully about the steady drive towards a two or three-tier secondary system, which I think will be more unfair than the old 11-plus, rightly rejected by most of our areas 30 years ago. At least in the 1950s and 1960s people had equal chances of getting into grammar school.

[Mr. Pickthall]

I look forward to the proposals on higher education, and hope that during the year the idea of top-up fees will be knocked on the head. It is another of the divisive set of ideas that seem to be growing up—although Cambridge seems to have turned against it, which is good. I could never support top-up fees, and I do not believe that most of the parliamentary Labour party could either.

I hope that the proposals that will come out during the year will carefully examine many of the Mickey Mouse degree courses that have sprung up throughout the country to accommodate the wide range of students being packed into universities to reach the ambitious and arbitrary target on the percentage of young people entering higher education. It is instructive to look at the admissions list of any provincial university five years ago, 10 years ago and today to see how many of the old core subjects have shrunk to tiny numbers and been replaced, as one of my colleagues said, by degrees in carpet fitting. Well, I have not quite come across one of those but it would not surprise me if one did emerge.

Mr. McWalter: At least it would be useful.

Mr. Pickthall: Better than philosophy.

Mr. McWalter: Outrageous.

Mr. Pickthall: Sorry.

I hope that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport will continue the wonderful work in enabling free access to many national and regional museums. There has been an important turnaround in my area. I visit museums throughout Merseyside and the north-west fairly regularly and see the massive increase in the number of people going there, particularly kids, who are going regularly. It is as serious a part of their education as anything else in the education sector.

The Queen's Speech announces a Bill to reform our totally outmoded licensing laws. I particularly commend the provisions that will allow police to shut down any licensed premises for 24 hours without notice. When I was the Private Parliamentary Secretary to the then Home Secretary, my right hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw), I participated in many discussions under the chairmanship of my hon. Friend the Member for North Warwickshire (Mr. O'Brien), in which we sought to balance the freedoms of much more flexible licensing hours and the benefits that brings, with effective protection for neighbourhoods that may experience destruction, noise or disorderly behaviour. I speak as someone who lives within staggering distance of a large pub; it is on the opposite side of the road. I have never had any problems with it but one never knows—if there are problems I have not noticed them.

I am pleased that the Department for Culture, Media and Sport has continued to work intelligently along those lines. I think that it will be a popular and successful Bill and change in the law if we get some of the little bits right. My one worry is about the new licensing authority being placed totally on the shoulders of local councils. I understand why it is being done and I think that I agree—there have been some pretty dodgy goings-on in the present system—but many people involved in the system, including licensees, have expressed concern that it may result in local political considerations, resulting in unfairness.

I hope that the Secretary of State, during the passage of the Bill, will consider placing the same restrictions on licensing committees that exist for planning committees on local councils in order to prevent caucusing, undue influence or whatever. Perhaps she may consider the virtues of licensing committees composed of councillors and local magistrates with an independent chairman. We discussed that and it was rejected but I cannot for the life of me remember what the reasons for its rejection were.

I am pleased with almost everything in the Queen's Speech, especially the crime and justice legislation. I am delighted that the ending of hunting with dogs is nigh and that we are to have significant legislation on the water industry, water supply, waste and emissions and sexual crime. Perhaps most of all, I look forward to campaigning in the near future on an elected regional assembly for the north-west.

11.24 am

Mr. Phil Willis (Harrogate and Knaresborough): It is always a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for West Lancashire (Mr. Pickthall). I now understand why he has not been offered a place on the Front Bench, but his comments are always apposite and to the point. I welcome that.

I welcome the Secretary of State for Education and Skills to the Dispatch Box and congratulate him on his appointment. It is the first time that we have met across the Dispatch Box since his appointment.

I would not wish to let the departure of the previous Secretary of State go without some mention. I, too, thought that she was less than generous about her own achievements as Secretary of State. I have been involved with Secretaries of State, I suppose, ever since I entered primary school at the age of five. She certainly was able to talk the language of teachers. She was able to restore a significant amount of confidence in our schools and for that I and my colleagues pay tribute to her. We were delighted that she was able to introduce good sound Liberal Democrat policy to the education service. It was interesting to hear the hon. Member for Ashford (Mr. Green) row back from proposals to get rid of sure start. It was in the 1997 manifesto of the Liberal Democrats but not in that of the Government. We were delighted when that issue was picked up and the policy put into operation.

We are delighted too that the previous Secretary of State was able to carry forward the pledge of early years places for all three and four-year-olds. That was an important achievement that has not been given the status that it deserved. Without a good early start for young people, many problems result later.

I suspect that the previous Secretary of State's greatest contribution was achieving the comprehensive spending review settlement for the Department. Many felt that her lack of bruising skills would result in the Department not getting those resources. Liberal Democrats welcome the significant resources that have gone into the education budget through the CSR. What

we are arguing about now is how those resources should be spent. There will be a healthy debate rather than one in which we say that we are going to outbid each other for the resources. We recognise that and pay tribute to her.

One area of contention that remains—the Secretary of State and the hon. Member for Ashford made it clear—is higher education funding. To address one of the challenges that the Secretary of State threw out, I do not think any of the political parties has an answer to how to fill the £9.7 billion black hole that the universities have identified. If higher education is to be expanded and, despite the fiddling of the figures, the ambition of 50 per cent. of students or more going into higher education is to be realised, one cannot project the 1960s post-Robins model of higher education into the 21st century and say, "We can afford that." My challenge to the Secretary of State, if we are in the business of talking across the Dispatch Box, is to look not simply at the funding issue but at the re-engineering of the higher education product.

I find it offensive to hear hon. Members call degrees Mickey Mouse degrees—I criticise the hon. Member for West Lancashire for doing so. If the Secretary of State, the Government and indeed our party are serious about a vocational route into higher education, we have to incorporate some of those vocational elements that traditionally were not part of higher education in the product, rather than simply deriding them. Media studies, which is often one of those Mickey Mouse courses that people deride, has a higher take-up in employment than virtually any other subject, so let us not get into that puerile debate. Let us look at how we re-engineer higher education to ensure that all of us can meet our aspirations and in particular that we offer to every student who goes into higher education one simple guarantee: the guarantee of quality. At the moment I do not believe that we offer quality in higher education and that must be addressed. I wish the Secretary of State well in his post.

Let me say something else about honesty. The reference by the hon. Member for Ashford to his past hairy self and the one to silver-backed gorillas in the sketch in *The Times* yesterday are quite unfair. Liberal Democrats want the Secretary of State to stand up for education and skills against the No. 10 policy unit. We want the Department to introduce its own policies, argue in its own right and have rows with the policy advisers in No. 10 who seem to dictate and dominate everything that happens. I wish the Secretary of State well in that too.

I suspect, knowing a little of the right hon. Gentleman, that he was not involved directly in this year's Gracious Speech. Indeed, it was clearly missing a public services trade descriptions Bill. What the right hon. Gentleman and other Secretaries of State have said so far in the debate on the Queen's Speech bears no reality to what is happening on the ground. Despite his rhetoric this morning about greater freedoms for our public services, it was clear today, just as it was clear from the speech by the Secretary of State for Health yesterday, that the dead hand of Government will continue to be at the centre of what is happening in public services.

I now turn to the issues that the Secretary of State addressed at the Dispatch Box. It was an interesting departure, in that because he has absolutely nothing to say and no Government policy initiatives to announce, he now engages the Opposition parties on their policies. He issued a number of challenges. The first one related to specialist schools. I could not answer better than the hon. Member for West Lancashire. In many ways his excellent speech encapsulated what is wrong at the heart of the specialist schools movement. Let me say to the Secretary of State, as I said to his predecessor, that I do not object to the Government's intention that all schools should have a specific ethos. That is absolutely right. Nor do the Liberal Democrats object to supporting the special ethos with additional resources.

We have exactly the same objection as the hon. Member for West Lancashire: this is a divisive system. It is impossible to create diversity in schools when, for example, the arts specialist school in my constituency is a Roman Catholic school that is significantly oversubscribed by Roman Catholics. We cannot create diversity within the community in that place. We cannot create diversity if Lady Lumley school in Pickering, which is the only rural school in a massive hinterland, becomes a physical education college, because all the children in Pickering and the surrounding rural areas go to that school.

The Secretary of State was absolutely clear about that in his speech, which was reported in *The Times*. As I said in an earlier intervention, he said that he did not expect all schools to become specialist schools. That disappoints me. The Secretary of State seems surprised; perhaps his speech was badly reported, but that is exactly what it says in the article.

Mr. Charles Clarke: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for allowing me to clarify the matter. I specifically said in my speech to Ofsted—I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for West Lancashire (Mr. Pickthall) that it was an excellent speech—that I believed that every school should have the ambition to be a specialist school and that the Government will seek to promote that, so I do not recognise the hon. Gentleman's description of what I said.

Mr. Willis: I am delighted that the Secretary of State intervened, because that is not how his speech was reported. If he is saying that the 60 per cent. cap on specialist status has now been lifted and that all schools can have it tomorrow, I am delighted. I have just conducted a survey of 250 schools that were unsuccessful in their application for specialist status. In most cases, the criteria on which they were turned down were spurious. The Secretary of State must know that around the country there is a real sense that schools are bidding for specialist status not because they want to be an arts college, a science college or whatever, but because they want £500,000. If the Secretary of State is saying that that will make no difference to communities over the next few years, I am sorry but I have to disagree with him, as the money would be badly spent otherwise.

The Secretary of State referred to targets and testing. I would include league tables in that. I am delighted that he has read the document that was presented at the Liberal Democrat party conference. We believe that Britain has a testing system instead of an education

[Mr. Willis]

system. Children now face 105 external tests between starting primary school and leaving school at 19. That cannot be right. Particularly at key stage 1, where it is an abomination to have SATs for seven-year-olds, we would prefer diagnostic tests that would allow a teacher to help individual children to improve by concentrating on particular deficiencies. At the moment, the tests are for the benefit of the Secretary of State as they are used to check on what schools are doing as a generic group of institutions. We need to concentrate on individual children. If the Secretary of State wants to pillory me for that, I shall stand up and be pilloried, as I think that defending the rights of individual children to a high-quality education rather than taking a systematic approach is desperately needed in our primary schools.

Mr. Kevan Jones: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that many teachers use SATs to identify pupils' weaknesses and establish individual performance improvement plans for them? In that way they are being used in primary schools to drive up standards across the board and for individual pupils.

Mr. Willis: I agree significantly with the hon. Gentleman. However, if he is saying that the way in which SATs are externally imposed on schools encourages their use as a diagnostic tool, I disagree with him. In my opinion, teachers make the very best use of everything within their purview. We are saying that at key stage 2 our aim is that 80 per cent. of children should achieve level 4 in literacy. If this means that we are teaching children about adjectival clauses, even though some of them can barely read because they are still working at level 1, there is something wrong with the system. We need a system that is more tailored to individuals; that does not mean that it has to be rigorous.

I fell out with the previous Secretary of State when she said that unless we keep the testing in place, teachers will slip back from the standards that we have achieved. I disagree fundamentally with that approach. We cannot hope to develop professionalism and good leadership in schools if we then say to teachers, "Unless we keep checking up on you, we know that you will fall back."

On funding, our policy is quite clear: from birth through to the age of 14—what is now key stage 3—we would expect the greater level of funding to be raised through local income tax. That should come as no surprise to the Secretary of State; it has been Liberal Democrat policy for a long time. He may disagree, but that is our policy.

The Secretary of State fell into the trap of saying, "That means we will not be able to put in central initiatives". That is exactly what we are trying to avoid. We do not want every initiative to come from the centre.

Since the Government came to power, they have raised the amount of money that they spend themselves—the money that is not spent through the traditional standard spending assessment route—from £500 million to just over £4.5 billion. I am delighted that that money is coming into education; I am not complaining about it. However, if one speaks to head teachers around the country, one finds that most of them want an increase in their baseline funding. They are not interested in the endless bidding for pots of money. They want to be able to plan for the longer term. Our attitude to the issue marks the fundamental difference between the centralising tendency of a Labour Government and the devolutionary approach of the Liberal Democrats.

I have not forgotten the issue of truancy and shall come to it later. However, before I move on from my discussion of schools, I wish to point out that we have innovation if the Secretary of State says so; schools can have autonomy if he says so; they can have specialist status if he says so; they can have advance specialist status if he says so; and they can become an academy if he says so. They cannot do anything anywhere unless he says so. If that is devolution and giving local schools the power to be able to get on with their lives, it is very different from the type of devolution that I envisage.

To return to the manifesto—*[Interruption.]* I am sorry—I meant the Gracious Speech. It was a Freudian slip. I am suffering today, and there is another hour of this. The 42 words on the Government's top priority did not refer to legislation, but we are not too bothered about that. There has been a lot of legislation in recent years. However, those words were a set of meaningless platitudes, and the Secretary of State did himself a disservice today by making a speech that was endlessly self-congratulatory. There were promises of reform—reform is the catchword—and yet more reviews, but where are the policy proposals?

Yesterday's *Financial Times* contained the headline, "Clarke in fresh drive to boost workers' skills" and the article said that the Secretary of State was aiming to stimulate debate and highlight areas of low demand. It was acknowledged five years ago that the skills deficit was a problem. Every householder in Britain knows that one cannot get a plumber, carpenter or electrician. Businesses are desperate to get technicians and manufacturers are desperate for key skilled workers. Since 1997, we have had the Moser report, four national skills taskforce reports and skill sector reports. Units in the Secretary of State's Department and in the Prime Minister's office have been dealing with the issue. The learning and skills councils have been set up and the training and enterprise councils have been ended, but what has been the result? After six years of recognising the problem, the Secretary of State announced yesterday that the Government would publish a skills strategy in the spring of 2003 for discussion. There will also be an announcement that Dolly Parton will back the drive to boost skills. That is it: a further review and policy statement, and Dolly Parton will appeal to today's teenagers just as much as the Secretary of State and I might fail to do.

Today, we read of a £2.5 billion investment in adult skills, and that sounds like big bucks. However, it is exactly the same money that has been announced on four previous occasions. If the Secretary of State is saying that new money is going into the sector for new initiatives that will back the skills strategy or, indeed, support Dolly Parton—pardon the expression—let us hear that today. I do not believe that he is saying that.

Why in the Secretary of State's speech and in the Gracious Speech did we not hear about a raft of proposals to follow up the ones on vocational and educational skills for 14 to 19-year-olds that were

announced in the Green Paper? There was common agreement on both sides of the House that the Green Paper was a worthwhile document that provided a platform for moving forward. Despite that consensus, there is stony silence from the Government.

Why was there no mention of the further education sector in the Gracious Speech? Why is the concentration on universities and not on the further education sector, which is the engine room for post-16 education? I was delighted that the Secretary of State referred to it today.

Last year, 808,500 16 to 19-year-olds attended FE colleges in the UK compared with 533,000 in schools. More students took A-levels in FE colleges than in schools and more students went to university from FE colleges than from schools. FE provided more work-related training than all the private sector providers put together and the vast majority of private employers. However, the impression remains that the FE sector belongs in the Nationwide league and not the premier league of education and training providers. It is as though "DFES Digital" has pulled the plug on colleges and their lecturers, who are left fighting for scraps as they look enviously at the premier schools division.

There was nothing in the Secretary of State's speech to resolve the massive dispute that is going on in FE between staff and lecturers and the Association of Colleges and its colleges. How can we value this vital sector if we simply say, "It is nothing to do with us, guv. Let them fight it out."? However, I understand that the Secretary of State will make a major announcement on FE next week, and perhaps the problem will be addressed at that point.

The challenge for the Government is to create a seamless service from 14 onwards, with a simple goal of keeping all young people in education or training at least until the age of 19. That is an ambitious target. Some 79.4 per cent. of young people stay on after 16, but half that number have left by the age of 19. They have dropped out. Nearly 500,000 16 to 18-year-olds do not participate in any education or training, and one in 10 of them is not involved in education, training or employment. That is why we are bottom of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development league table for level 3 skills. We are not attracting or retaining students in education and training.

Perhaps the most depressing statistic of all is that the majority of people who reach 19 without formal qualifications—even at level 2—do not get them by the time that they finish their working life. That stigma not only remains with them, but creates an economic and social barrier that stays with them. I compliment the Secretary of State and assure him that Liberal Democrats will do everything to support his efforts to deal with that problem. However, he must run up the flagpole a statement that makes it clear that the Government's current attitude that education is for the best and skills are for the rest will change. Every speech that he makes must make it clear that education and skills are for all.

We must not introduce a vocational programme that is seen as second to academic programmes. If the Secretary of State goes ahead with the proposals of the Minister for Lifelong Learning and Higher Education that we should have stand-alone colleges for 16 to 19-year-olds and that the FE sector should be the dumping ground for those who cannot get into academic institutions, he will do an immense disservice to education and skills training.

The Secretary of State challenged me on the issue of truancy and exclusions. I say to him in all sincerity that, if his attitude is to encourage *Daily Mail* headlines saying that we shall remove benefits from, or fine, the parents of truanting pupils and that we shall put single mothers into prison, the Labour Government will fail. There is absolutely no evidence that such policies will work. I take a "longitudinal" view of these matters: if we cannot re-engage young people with education and training and create a curriculum in our schools that turns young people on, not off, such draconian proposals will do little other than penalise families who are already under great strain.

Who will police the powers? Who will pick up the truants? The Secretary of State knows and the Department has published what the short, sharp truancy sweeps cost. If they are to be made permanent and continual, we will have to have an army of people on the streets to pick up kids. How can one tell whether someone is truanting? Even during the Department's experiments, huge opposition was encountered from the parents of students who were picked up when going to the doctor, looking after a sick mother, or engaged in other legitimate activities. One of the ludicrous proposals made by one of the right hon. Gentleman's colleagues was to give the milkman or the postman a set of vouchers to find truants. We need to do more than that.

The Liberal Democrats will support proposals that are tough on truants and tough about exclusions, but we will do so only if there is a balance between carrot and stick. We want more of the carrot from the Department for Education and Skills. Earlier this week, many of the Department's officials attended a reception that I organised with Inaura, a charity working in the area of exclusions. There are some splendid examples of boroughs and local education authorities that have tackled exclusions in a positive and supportive manner. Exclusion-free zones, managed transfers and the principle that a child who is kicked out of a school is not kicked out of society should all be fundamental to the Government's thinking. I hope that they will pick up those ideas and use them.

I am dismayed that no mention is made in the Gracious Speech of the appalling debacle of this summer's A-levels. It now appears that there was no crisis: Sir William Stubbs should not have been sacked, the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Yardley should not have resigned, and thousands of parents, teachers and students have simply been experiencing paranoia. We are told that it was a storm in a teacup and we should no longer discuss it—but if the Secretary of State believes that the issue will go away, he is burying his head in the sand. Had it not been for the dogged determination of the media that the right hon. Gentleman derides, especially *The Observer*, the Government would have been allowed to bury that bad-news story a long time ago.

Thousands of students, teachers and parents are angry. They believe that the system let them down this year, and they are right. Furthermore, faith in our examinations system will not be restored while so many

[Mr. Willis]

questions remain unanswered. Evidence given to me and to the Tomlinson inquiry suggests that tens of thousands of grades awarded this summer could still be wrong. Having met Mike Tomlinson this week, it is clear to me that he knows that this year's grades are no guide to the relative performance of many students and schools. In respect of the Oxford, Cambridge and RSA board's English literature examination, Mr. Tomlinson went further, saying:

"it was difficult to know if any students got their just desserts."

That one subject affected 9,000 students. A similar problem, affecting 6,000 students, arose with the psychology examination. If the Secretary of State can sit on the Treasury Bench saying, "This has nothing to do with me, guv—those students can go to hell," we are in a very bad state of affairs. [HON. MEMBERS: "No!"] At last, some animation.

Everywhere I go, I hear evidence that justice has not been done. Most MPs—including the few currently in the Chamber—know of cases in which A-grade coursework reappeared as unclassified. We now know of cases in which students who were native speakers of Russian, French or German failed to obtain more than the minimum grade in their oral examination. That is like telling an Olympic swimmer that he can just about get his 25-metre certificate. That was the extent of the discrepancy between students' work and the grades they were given. It is no good saying everything is fine because we have had a short inquiry; plainly, everything is not fine.

Mr. Charles Clarke: I referred to some of those issues in my speech. I do not suggest that the issues do not have to be dealt with—of course they do. However, Mike Tomlinson is an independent figure, and we should read his report and draw our conclusions from it. Does the hon. Gentleman accept that Mike Tomlinson is an independent figure and an appropriate person to carry out the investigation? Does he have any criticisms—and if so, will he state them in the House—of the methodology used by Mr. Tomlinson when reaching his conclusions?

Mr. Willis: I place absolutely no blame on Mike Tomlinson. I have complete faith in his integrity and have heard no one question it. It is the Government in whom I have no faith, because it was the Government who decided the terms of the inquiry. Mike Tomlinson could do only what he was asked to do by the then Secretary of State and her Ministers. Ultimately, the inquiry was flawed, as I shall explain.

The inquiry's terms of reference had more to do with saving the face of Ministers than with getting to the truth. It now emerges that chief executives of the boards had enormous power to control the outcome of the inquiry, even though they were the jointly accused in the dock. They were asked to provide historical evidence about unusually large movements of grade boundaries in the closing stages of the awarding process. In respect of OCR, that evidence ensured that, in almost all cases, the Tomlinson review looked only at changes of six marks or more. The inquiry was not given a breakdown by year or by subject on which to make its judgments—nor did it ask for that evidence. In fact, the way in which the inquiry was set up ensured that it did not have the power to demand such details.

I am told—the Secretary of State can disagree if he likes—that in the past, movements of more than two marks were unusual, and movements of five marks were exceptionally rare, yet the cut-off for the inquiry was six marks or more. Roger Porkess, a distinguished mathematician who is responsible for one of the largest mathematics A-level syllabuses, has done the work. He has shown—the evidence was given to Mike Tomlinson, despite what the Minister for Lifelong Learning and Higher Education said this morning—that movements of grade boundaries of five marks could have had a devastating effect, resulting in more than 20,000 wrong grades being given.

Roger Porkess offered his evidence to the inquiry, but we now know that Tomlinson did not have the power to summon evidence from anyone who was not a board employee. In the case of OCR, he took no evidence from those who set the original grade boundaries, the chief examiners, despite the fact that they could have supplied key evidence to his inquiry. I ask the Secretary of State why that was the case.

Even more surprising, at the end of the inquiry chief executives had the power to veto any change to grade boundaries, and some did exactly that. It is crucial that we know which chief executives vetoed changes and which subjects were affected. Indeed, could this be one of the reasons why so few changes materialised? This explains how Ron McLone—the chief executive of OCR, which was found to be the main board responsible—was able to tell the Select Committee with some pride last week that as a result of the Tomlinson review, changes had been made in only 18 out of 1,012 sets of results. Does that demonstrate the rightness of OCR's original decisions, or does it show the extent to which the review was prevented from correcting OCR's mistakes?

I hope that the Secretary of State will not do as he said earlier this morning, and do nothing. Instead, I hope that he will ask Mike Tomlinson to reopen his review of this year's A-level results to determine the answers to these questions. I hope that he will give him the time and the power to do the job properly. Mike Tomlinson must have the power to demand information from the boards and stop their ability to override and use their veto. Crucially, Ministers must cancel publication of performance tables based on this year's A-level results until the grades have been reviewed again. Finally, the Secretary of State must ensure that no scripts are destroyed until all the lessons have been learned from this year's debacle.

Next Friday, OCR will torch all the papers in its control. How can that be right when after next Friday anybody who, for instance, went to a judicial inquiry, or who wished to go through the courts, would only be able to say, "There is no evidence, guv, it has all been burned"? Our plea to the Secretary of State is that he should start his term of office by putting right one of the great wrongs of this summer.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Before I call the next speaker, I must tell the House that the debate has been going on for two and a half hours, and so far there have been only four speakers. Many Members wish to catch my eye. Unless speeches are considerably shorter, very many Members will be disappointed.

I call Mr. McWalter.

12 pm

Mr. Tony McWalter (Hemel Hempstead): I shall speak from the perspective of a member of the Science and Technology Select Committee, and also a Member representing a Hertfordshire constituency. From that background, I have to say to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State that I think that in many ways the system is a mess. Although I enjoyed his speech, I think that the focus on what the Opposition might say rather takes one's eye off the ball. The main job of the Government is to identify what is wrong, and seek to address it and put it right. From that perspective I found my right hon. Friend's speech slightly disappointing.

Before I make my main remarks I shall inform the House, and through the House others, of a matter that is only distantly related to education. Yesterday I visited a school in my constituency, and during the day I had given an interview on the firemen's dispute. My right hon. and hon. Friends on the Front Bench will be somewhat surprised when I say that I took an entirely Blairite approach to the dispute. That included saying that Andy Gilchrist was a latter-day Arthur Scargill. The House will be able to imagine my dismay last night at half-past nine when I found that my constituency office was on fire.

It was quite a serious fire. The green goddesses were called out with ancillary vehicles and police support. I am pleased to report that the fire was entirely an accident. It started on the floor of the shop beneath my constituency office. Some people were preparing for the shop to be occupied, and I believe that someone had dropped a cigarette end, or possibly put it out with his foot. It had gone through the floorboard, under which there was inflammable material. After some hours, the shop was full of smoke.

I mention this partly because the Fire Brigades Union, in the form of the local commander, Jim Smith, came along to offer support. I was pleased by the response of the interim fire services, but later I returned to the fire station, where members of the FBU were outside with their brazier. I said, "It's all right, it wasn't malevolent, it was an accident." I think that they were worried that perhaps one of their enthusiasts had set the fire. We then had an interesting discussion about how FBU members might help with education. I said, "Perhaps we should get you into schools, not only to tell people to have fire alarms, but to talk, for instance, about the chemistry of combustible materials and the precise cutting equipment needed to cut through various modern metals in motor cars."

We had an enjoyable discussion about whether senior officers in the fire service might be able to contribute something to science education in schools. I will not say that they welcomed me with open arms, but at least there was a meeting of minds on some matters. To put the record straight, no police action was taken.

When I said that science and technology in the education system were in a mess, I was not thinking of primary and secondary education, on which the Secretary of State focused, or further education, which was dealt with in the excellent speech of the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis), but of the university system itself. I disagree profoundly with the hon. Gentleman about so-called Mickey Mouse degrees. As a member of the Science and Technology Committee, I have seen consistent evidence that if students are offered one course that involves a significant mathematics component and another involving very little mathematics indeed, they opt for the latter. There is also considerable evidence that students offered one course that entails considerable training in a foreign language and another that has no foreign language component at all opt for the latter. I was approached to give advice on a political economy degree that was to be structured in such a way that there would be no mathematical requirements for the undergraduates.

When I was studying, I tried to avoid mathematical logic—an integral part of my studies—particularly in courses that were assessed by examination. I ended up, however, after various wheezes, spending many years teaching it; there are several ways of skinning a cat. Formidable courses may be on offer, but if a market system is in operation and people can get a qualification by doing courses that are not formidable, most of them, myself included, tend to go for the less formidable ones. As a result, the number of people leaving university who are equipped to teach subjects such as physics, mathematics and chemistry in school is diminishing all the time. Courses with titles like "Tourism studies (no foreign language requirement)" are much more popular than courses with titles like "Tourism studies (two languages required)".

It is no good the Government saying that they want 50 per cent. of young people to enter university if what awaits them are courses that do not challenge them. Such courses do not provide the opportunity for personal growth that real education allows its participants. There is consistent evidence that the system is failing in that respect. As a result, physics and chemistry courses in secondary schools are increasingly bereft of the expertise of people who may otherwise have pursued extremely challenging studies. I therefore urge the Secretary of State to consider whether we really need a market system in education—students think only in terms of what most suits them—or whether we need greater Government input into which courses people should take for the greater benefit of our economy, our country and, indeed, themselves. People who meet and overcome difficult challenges feel better about themselves and are of greater use to the country.

Mr. Gardiner: I have listened carefully to my hon. Friend. Does he agree that there is a real danger in what he proposes? It is similar to the danger that both he and I, as former academic philosophers, lived through in the 1980s, when, because of Government intervention at the time, the rate of decline in philosophy was so marked

[Mr. Gardiner]

that if it had continued, by the turn of the century there would have been 19 academic philosophers still practising in this country.

Mr. McWalter: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, and I admire his expertise. What he says is true. I have mentioned a couple of examples of challenging courses that create problems for students. In the subject that both my hon. Friend and I love with a great passion—philosophy—students are regularly expected to read material written, say, in the 18th century, or to understand the variations in translation of a text written in Greek. Such requirements make students wonder whether they have the ability to cope. School studies equip people less and less effectively for that. It is vital that whatever subject people study, whether it is English literature or physics, philosophy or chemistry, it presents the challenges—the peaks—to which people need to aspire.

To show how little that is part of our culture, I shall add that I am speaking on the day when the leading obituary in *The Times* is that of René Thom, who was a great mathematician, the author of catastrophe theory, a great philosopher of science and the holder of the Fields prize. Most people in our society would not have a clue what the Fields prize is. It is, as even *The Times* had to explain today, the equivalent of the Nobel prize in mathematics. Most people do not have that basic understanding of what the summit of a scientific career might mean.

Why am I raising those points? Of course, some subjects are harder than others. As David Hume said, there is a disposition towards laziness in the human spirit that the Almighty might have sought to correct. There is a further issue involving the kind of courses and the brief around which universities might orientate themselves. Science courses, particularly in engineering, are often very high capital courses. They are extremely expensive to offer. Although there is a differential in the amount given to universities to teach science students and students taking subjects that are, shall I say, somewhat easier—such as tourism studies without the touring—a university that wants to be financially effective would be well advised not to lay on courses in heavy engineering or physics.

University after university is closing such courses—for example, chemistry at Salford. In my own little university of Hertfordshire, I have had a desperate battle to protect physics and astronomy, despite the fact that it has a nationally recognised research rating, because astronomy requires an observatory, which is difficult to maintain. The chemistry department at my little university has just shut. Civil engineering has just shut. That is under a Labour Government, who have failed to realise that there is a crisis in the core sciences.

When two Ministers gave evidence to the Science and Technology Committee recently, neither was remotely on the pace. One of them said that more students were doing science degrees than ever. He obviously did not look very closely at what they are doing. Yes, the word "science" occurs in more people's graduate certificates than ever, but it is sports science, computer science and so on—all sorts of science, but not the core stuff. Those skills, that intelligence and that understanding are vital to our country, and it is the Government's job to protect them.

Adam Price (East Carmarthen and Dinefwr): To what extent does the hon. Gentleman think that the low numbers taking science degrees reflect not only the perceived intellectual difficulty of such courses but, especially with engineering, the collapse in manufacturing and the low level of remuneration for scientists?

Mr. McWalter: The hon. Gentleman makes an extremely good point. The reason for the 18-week wait for a cervical smear at Hemel Hempstead general hospital—a scandal—is that the hospital laboratory pays people £12,000 a year for doing an extremely skilled job under difficult and pressured conditions, when one mistake can often make the headlines, but if one does the job capably for years and years there is no recognition or proper reward. We must ensure that those with scientific skills are properly honoured.

That applies throughout the system. One question that emerged from my discussions with fire brigades officers yesterday was the extent to which those who drafted the Bain report had any scientific expertise. At all levels, either people with the required expertise are unavailable, or those managing the systems do not understand that there are people around who have the understanding that would have made their deliberations more effective.

That applies to subjects such as statistics, too. In an earlier intervention I pointed out that to compare the average earnings of graduates with those of the rest is crazy. We should compare the average earnings of graduates with those of people who could have been graduates but chose not to be. I do not accept that there is necessarily any financial benefit at all from being a graduate. However, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State did not pose the question in quite those terms. He said that there was a benefit for graduates. As a passionate advocate of university education, I agree wholeheartedly: there is enormous benefit and personal enrichment to be gained from a university course, particularly those that make great demands on one. But that is a different matter from whether there is any financial benefit, and I shall look carefully at the research that underlies any Government attempt to impose a graduate tax on the basis that graduates earn more.

It is a cultural issue that gives rise to low earnings for those with engineering and science qualifications. There is little willingness now for people to regard education as nearly as vital to the quality of life as it should be. I was talking to the Secretary of State earlier about what I call the Welsh valley culture—the sense that education is marvellous and life enriching, and that everybody should get as much of it as they can—compared with the dominant culture in our society, whereby to be educated or to be particularly a good at something is to be a nerd or a "boff". There is almost a culture that it is acceptable to be learned only if one has made no effort. Making an effort is not regarded as de rigueur—but making an effort is vital to the process of becoming educated. It is vital that we try to rebalance the system, so it becomes

part of the culture that it is acceptable to think, to be learned and to understand—that it is acceptable to display an understanding that others might not have.

To return to the firefighters' dispute, when I talked to my fire officers six weeks ago and used the word hyper-inflation, as far as I could see none knew what it meant. Yet the Opposition talk about how otiose courses in citizenship are. They are not otiose at all. It is fundamental to the conduct of our society that people understand the consequences of their actions, including such economic learning as might make them aware that their actions have consequences, and that those consequences have consequences as well.

I have said most of what I wanted to say as a member of the Select Committee on Science and Technology, and I would like to conclude with some thoughts as a Member representing a Hertfordshire seat. A dagger is pointing at the education system in our county. The office in my constituency to which I referred—which luckily was not burnt down last night in the end—is rented for £9,000 a year. The rates cost another £3,500, so the total cost is £12,500. Hon. Members will be aware that we receive slightly more than £18,000 for running our offices. They may ask why that is relevant. The fact is that in Hertfordshire, not much is left for running the photocopier, the telephones and all the rest of it, because the costs there are far greater than those in many other places. Indeed, a colleague from Glasgow told me that he provides exactly the same service as me, close to the town centre but not inside it, for £4,000. His disposable income for his office is £14,000 and mine is £6,000. How awful. However, let us bear in mind that that burden is taken on by Hertfordshire county council, too, when it tries to provide social services, education and other functions, so its disposable income is far less than that of many other authorities.

We currently have a very crude system called standard spending assessment to deal with how much it costs to provide a standard level of service to the people of a community. How much does it cost? That is a good question. It leads us to what, in the light of a recent parliamentary answer, I might call the Swindon answer—a £500 gap between the cost of laying on the services in Hertfordshire and the cost of the same services in Swindon. The local government Bill announced in the Queen's Speech implies that we are going to scrap standard spending assessment. That is well and good, as long as the system that will replace it is numerate and informed enough to be properly responsive to the needs of the people in my constituency for services that are more expensive to deliver than services in Glasgow. As it is currently drafted, that Bill is a big threat to the unit of resource that can be made available to schools in my area.

I have been critical throughout my speech. Of course, the picture that I have painted is dark, because it is the job of Members of Parliament and Back Benchers to point to what needs to be done rather than pat themselves on the back about what they have done. I know that the Government will take on board the points that have been made. When we made such points about primary schools, they took them on board and there has been a sea change in the quality of experience of primary school pupils in my constituency. I thank the Secretary of State and his predecessors for the tremendous work that they have done. I know that they can respond to arguments, and that they will respond to this one.

12.23 pm

Mr. John Wilkinson (Ruislip-Northwood): In the Queen's Speech, certain words keep reappearing. The word "modernised" appears four times and "reform" appears 12 times. I hope that it is not lèse-majesté to suggest that the phrase that I missed most was "My Ministers, in the process of modernising the procedures of Parliament, will set a good example by curtailing the length of their speeches from the Front Bench." I looked in vain for the word "sport", almost as for most of this morning I have looked in vain for the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, whom I now see in the Chamber, but who did a runner from it for most of the proceedings. However, she is back and I welcome her, because she has to wind up the debate and it will be a good thing for her to listen to some of the speeches.

I want simply to address the importance for the country and for London of a bid for the 2012 Olympic games. I believe that they should be located at Stratford in east London and that such a bid should have the full support of Her Majesty's Government. The games would greatly regenerate a part of our capital that urgently needs more jobs and an improved infrastructure. In spite of those temporary disadvantages, Stratford has key features that would make it the ideal location.

A stakeholders group has been under way for some time. It comprises representatives of the British Olympic Association, the Greater London Authority and the Government. The BOA has the sole right to suggest a city for the United Kingdom's bid. Clearly, it must do so with national Government and local government support.

To his credit, the Mayor of London—I trust that he will not be Mayor for much longer—has made it plain that, in his judgment, Stratford is the right location. The Government said that they are continuing to deliberate on the matter. They must reach a conclusion by next January. They also said that they hope to hold a debate in Parliament. This is a thoroughly healthy proposal, which I welcome. I trust that the debate will take place before Christmas.

The Arup report, which was compiled by the ill-named "stakeholder group"—I suppose that we know what it means—of the BOA, GLA and the Government, is worth perusing. There is a copy of this admirable document in the Library. Its analysis is thorough and its argument cogent and compelling.

First, the report deals with the questions, "Why London?" and "Why the United Kingdom?" Europe will host the games in Athens in 2004; they then go to Beijing. It would be good if a capital which represents freedom and liberty in another continent should succeed Beijing.

However, we would delude ourselves if we imagined that a later bid, for xample, for 2016, would succeed. After Asia, Europe will probably have a good chance of hosting the games in 2012, and Paris is bidding hard. If we do not get 2012 for London, we may miss the opportunity for a generation. We would also miss an opportunity to regenerate a key part of our city.

There was talk of a west London site, perhaps around Northolt near my constituency, but the controversy about the third runway for Heathrow airport has shown

[Mr. John Wilkinson]

the extent to which that area is congested. The hon. Member for Brent, North (Mr. Gardiner) nods. I do not believe that it would be the right location.

Stratford is a nodal point on the railway system, which will be served by crossrail by then. It is close to the airports of Luton, Stansted, the City and Southend, and will not be too far from the expanded Heathrow, with terminal 5 in operation. It will therefore have good transport links. Providing a village for the athletes, a stadium and a warm-up track would create many jobs for the region and a permanent infrastructure which would be useful to the area and the capital for many years after 2012.

After all, 11,000 athletes would attend 300 events over 16 days. In addition, there would be 5,000 to 6,000 coaches and officials, 4,000 members of the Olympic family and 7,000 sponsors to accommodate, as well as 4,000 athletes for the Paralympics and the 2,500 officials who attend them. The Paralympics are an important feature of the Olympic games.

We must not forget the 20,000 journalists who would need not only accommodation, but the pubs and entertainment which are traditional for them. Furthermore, 9 million tickets would be sold—some 500,000 a day—and 63,000 operational personnel such as stewards, drivers, marshals and so on would need to be recruited. The enterprise would be immense, but if we consider the benefit that Sydney has obtained, we can recognise that it could be a big commercial winner for London too.

Section S8 of the Arup report on the quantified costs and benefits contains an analysis which concludes that the surplus over the whole enterprise should be about £82 million while the downside would be minus £145 million. However, the inward investment, tourism and publicity gained by London would, I am sure, be measurably and demonstrably positive for a long time to come. There would also be a cultural benefit and the project would be an example to our young people of the merits of healthy competition and vigorous participation at the highest level of athletics.

I hope that the Government take a lead. I know that the Secretary of State is undertaking a programme of visits to cities which have either recently held the games and benefited or that could perhaps be competing, so I trust that all of us who believe in our country and in London as the right location and who want to build on the Manchester Commonwealth games, which were an achievement of which we can be proud, will get involved. In the international context, however, a capital city must be the venue, and I think that it should be London in 2012. We should all get behind London—the Government, the GLA and Parliament.

12.31 pm

Mr. Barry Gardiner (Brent, North): I begin by offering my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, who has left the Chamber for a moment or two, my congratulations on his appointment. I also congratulate the teachers in my constituency of Brent, North: I believe that I have some of the finest in the country—and some of the finest head teachers to boot. I know that simply because I see what they have achieved in their schools over the past five years.

The figures for key stage 2 English SATs were 65.2 per cent., but they are now up at 74.6 per cent. The maths results have improved from 61 per cent. to 75.8 per cent. The science results, which were 68.7 per cent., are 85.2 per cent.—a 16.5 per cent. increase in five years. I pay tribute to the work done by those teachers and by head teachers, parents and pupils. A-level grades show a similar rise. In 2001, the figure for grades A to C was 54 per cent. This year, it is 62 per cent., which is an 8 per cent. rise in just one year. That shows the commitment put in by teachers and by students. I welcome it and congratulate all concerned.

I must also highlight the Government's work in investing in those children and those schools. In particular, I want the House to consider the fact that, over the past year, £2.7 million has been going into Wembley high school in my constituency, achieving specialist technology status for it. Also, £2.7 million is going into Kingsbury Green primary school in my constituency, which has created 13 new classrooms, a new hall and six special educational needs rooms for the deaf children who learn there. That sort of investment has achieved the results that I mentioned.

Let me also discuss how the private finance initiative has worked in education. In the past year, one of the oldest schools in the world and one of the most academically excellent schools in the country has come to my constituency. I refer, of course, to the Jews' Free school, which was previously located in Camden. It has moved to Kenton in my constituency, into a new school that was built under the PFI scheme, on time and to budget, costing £47 million. It is a staggering investment in the future of those children and in excellence. The "small" sports hall is bigger than the entire Chamber of the House of Commons, and one needs a pair of binoculars to see across the large sports hall. We need such facilities and resources in all our schools, and they have been delivered, under the PFI model, in that school for the benefit of the children there.

I wish to utter a word of caution to my hon. Friend the Minister for Lifelong Learning and Higher Education about the problems that PFI can bring. A consortium of schools in my constituency, including two primary schools, Preston Park primary and Wembley junior and infants, put in for the first round of bidding for PFI funding. Putting the bid together took a tremendous amount of human resources, hours and commitment. The schools were not successful—it was a highly commended bid—and were encouraged to re-submit, only to find that the criteria were to be changed for the re-submission. Obviously, all the time and commitment that went into the preparation of the initial bid have been lost and the schools must start again from the beginning. The Minister will appreciate that head

teachers and local education authority officials spend tremendous amounts of time putting forward such bids and they find such things extremely depressing.

Some of the schools in my constituency need extra support. My part of north-west London has an extremely varied population. One of the great strengths of the borough of Brent is that it is more diverse than any other borough, not just in the country but I believe in Europe. More than 120 different languages are spoken as mother tongue in our schools and an enormous number of asylum seekers locate in Brent, North. Although that brings great cultural diversity and other benefits to the area, it puts a tremendous strain on resources in local schools. Two years ago, in a reception class of 29 children, 21 different mother tongue languages were spoken. In the same school, there has been a 40 per cent. turnover of pupils in a single year. That has a destabilising effect on schools and they should command extra resources.

I understand what the Government are doing in looking at the funding formula, and I understand all the policies surrounding asylum issues and the dispersal of asylum seekers. However, those schools need that assistance. I do not contend that ethnicity is a perfect indicator or criterion. Research reports have shown that different ethnic groups do well or poorly in varying degrees. It is not a necessary consequence of a large ethnicity that groups will pose extra burdens on a school. However, when the funding formula is assessed, and when the local education criteria are established, in areas where there is multiple ethnicity, especially multiple language that goes with a transient school population, those needs must be reflected in the educational standard spending assessment criteria. I hope that the Minister will pass my comments on to her colleagues in the relevant Department, because such action is vital for the educational achievement of children in my constituency.

My central argument relates not only to education but to the role of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. More sport must be played in our schools. I want to set out how that can be achieved. In particular, I would argue that sport in secondary schools should be increased from the current aspiration of two hours per week to a timetabled allocation of two hours per day. Physical education lessons should remain part of the core curriculum, and would be in addition to the two hours of sport a day. The school day should be increased to run from 8.30 am to 6 pm to account for that.

The benefits of sport are enormous. I shall outline and document the benefits for health, social inclusion, reduced youth crime and academic standards in our schools. Sport has always played a large part in the curriculum, but in recent years the importance of sport in schools has declined markedly owing to pressure on school timetables coupled with 18 years of Conservative Administration in which playing fields were sold off.

The Government's policy is that all pupils aged five to 16 should be offered two hours of sport per week either in school time or after school. That was announced in January 2001 as an intention, since when Ministers have referred to it as an aspiration or, more recently, as an expectation.

Sport in the United Kingdom is in a state of decline. Lack of investment over the past 25 years has left us with a decaying infrastructure and no clear direction. Sport has been pushed aside as a budget priority, and with constant pressure on funding for the poor public services the case has to be made that sport is integral to the delivery of every aspect of the Government's policy, including health, reduction in youth crime and academic achievement.

Some sources have commented that the best way to encourage and foster the take-up of sport is to stress the importance of sport in schools. Despite Government attempts to safeguard the amount of time that is devoted to sport in schools, timetabled PE and sports lessons are at their lowest for many years. Pressures on the school timetable make it unlikely that that will change in the current climate. A wide variety of benefits would accrue from an increased take-up of sports by secondary school pupils. In the short term, benefits would include a reduction in youth crime, improved academic achievement and social cohesion. In the longer term, there would be associated benefits to public health, as today's schoolchildren grow older.

Members will know of the National Audit Office report that came before the Select Committee on Public Accounts, which looked into obesity. One of its key findings was that the present generation of children are more obese and that by the time they get to middle age they will be the first generation who are likely regularly to pre-decease their parents, because of the diseases associated with obesity such as diabetes and blindness. Those common problems are predicted by every health authority, and by the recent convention in Copenhagen that looked into this issue. We in the United Kingdom face a great threat.

Encouraging the take-up of sport among the young is widely recognised as the most successful way of increasing participation. Moreover, young people who are involved in sport are more likely to be physically active throughout the rest of their lives. My right hon. Friend the Minister for Sport put it this way:

> "School is where most children are first introduced to sport and where they either develop a lifelong passion for it . . . or are turned off it for life."

If take-up is to increase, investment is required. Some investment has already been made, but it should go further. My proposal to the Government would give existing funding a firm policy direction. A radical reform of sporting provision would cement the good work already being done in the Department, and would provide a framework within which future investment could be made more effectively.

As my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State knows, I have introduced a pilot scheme in my constituency involving four or five schools, but I think it vital for us in government to make the case for school sport. British children engage in less sport than those in most other European countries; worse than that, they engage in sport of a lower quality than those in most other European countries. Twenty-eight per cent. of children engage in sport regularly or intensively in the United Kingdom; in Finland 28 per cent. do so occasionally or rarely, while 39 per cent. do so intensively and 33 per cent. do so regularly.

We must reverse the situation. We must aspire to what countries such as Finland and Sweden have already achieved if we are to produce a healthier, fitter nation that is more successful. That will be reflected in

[Mr. Barry Gardiner]

more economic benefit and fewer absences from the workplace. The annual cost to the British economy of obesity-related diseases is £2 billion, £0.5 billion of which is incurred by the national health service.

We spend £750 per head on health care, and £1 per head on sport. That is nonsensical. It is a scandal that we, a Government who believe in preventive action in terms of health and are examining the primary care delivery service, do not see that by taking a few pounds out of that £750 and spending it on sport we could transform the health and well-being of our population.

The best way of easing the pressure on the NHS is to improve the general standard of public health. Sport England's national survey found that in 1999 only 33 per cent. of six to 16-year-olds spent two or more hours a week at school in physical education. In 1994, the figure was 46 per cent. We have gone backwards. The Public Accounts Committee found that

"Achievement of children's entitlement to two hours of physical exercise each week requires an adequate and equitable distribution of facilities. There is, however, a considerable disparity in the opportunities for sport currently being offered to children by different schools".

A significant amount of research has concluded that obesity is on the increase because less sport is being played. The national diet and nutrition survey found that schoolchildren are becoming less active as less sport is being played in school. The relevance of the correlation between children becoming less active and obesity becoming more prevalent is stressed not only in the NAO report. We cannot ignore it.

By setting in place a definitive time for school sports and placing that in the middle of the school day, we will ensure that sport is played and therefore improve the health of the nation. We will reduce the costs to the NHS and the wider economy and ensure that demand for sporting provision is kept constant and high.

The revised timetable would facilitate the introduction of breakfast clubs at the start of the school day. Research by the National Policy Institute has shown that breakfast clubs have a large beneficial impact not only on the health but on the concentration of students, on punctuality and on secondary school pupils' attendance.

One of the central recommendations for reducing obesity contained in the NAO report was:

"The Department for Health and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport should consider the adoption of joint performance targets for increasing the number of people engaged in sport and physically active leisure activities".

Other sources have identified sport as crucial to improving the nation's health. The Wanless report stated:

"proactive policies which promote reductions in key risk factors and improved health information will help people engage with their own health".

Social exclusion, the breakdown of community and the need for regeneration have been much discussed in the Chamber. Significant positive results can be achieved from encouraging sport in the community, particularly among schoolchildren. A report by the Cabinet Office's policy action team on the effects of sport and the arts on social inclusion noted:

"Arts and sport are not just an 'add-on' to regeneration work. They are fundamental to community involvement and ownership of any regeneration initiative when they offer means of positive engagement in tune with local interests."

The Denham report, which looked at the causes and effects of the Bradford riots from 6 to 9 July 2001, recognised the importance of sport for young people in avoiding the breakdown in community that caused the riots, noting that

"Sporting and cultural opportunities can play an important part in re-engaging disaffected sections of the community, building shared social capital and grass roots leadership through improved cross-cultural interaction."

The report goes on to stress the importance of those opportunities for young people in particular. It notes that the first efforts to rebuild community relations in the area following the riots involved setting up sports schemes for children to get involved with during the remainder of their summer holidays, using sport not just for its benefits to health but for its ability to draw people together. Those benefits of sport could be exploited more efficiently in the school context.

While crime has been steadily falling since 1997, certain forms of crime—street robberies in particular—have been rising. Indeed, many of the crimes that have been on the increase are seen as youth crime and the criminals that commit those acts are often children of secondary school age. The Secretary of State for Education and Skills talked earlier about the problems of truancy and street crime and the relation between the two.

Sport has been identified as a key method in reducing youth crime. The positive futures schemes, run by Sport England, the Football Foundation, the Youth Justice Board and the Home Office drugs unit, aim to get young people off the streets by encouraging them to play sport.

An increase in school sports and an extension to the school day would have the effect of reducing youth crime. Two of the Home Office-defined risk factors show that youth crime is on the rise when children are hanging around after school and when they are unsupervised by their parents; when parents do not know where they are. The youth lifestyle survey said:

"Boys who hung around in public places were also more likely to be offenders: the odds of offending were nearly four times greater for boys who had hung around in public places compared with those who had not".

By extending the school day and making space for sport we would reduce the possibility of children hanging around in public places and the chance of their committing crimes. Children would move from school supervision to home without the three-hour gap between the end of the school day and supper at home. By extending the school day we would remove the fact that parents do not know where their children are and children hang around with nothing to do.

The contribution that sport can make when incorporated into our schools in quite incalculable. The Department for Culture, Media and Sport is working closely across Government with the Department of Health and the Department for Education and Skills and I commend that work. However, we should be

moving faster and further. Two hours of sport per week is a commendable aspiration, but it is not enough. One of the barriers to providing more sport in schools is the lack of facilities and resources. I have already referred to the sell-off of sports fields under the previous Government.

I also urge my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to review provision within our schools so that more than half a year group can have changing facilities at any one time; so that the whole school can engage in sport; and so that facilities are available to enable children to participate in a way that will improve the long-term health of our nation, reduce the juvenile crime statistics, reduce the amount of truancy in our schools and improve academic standards. I hope that my right hon. Friend will look carefully at the results of the pilot scheme in my constituency over the next three years. As she knows it will not start until next September, but I believe that if we can show them the results that I confidently believe can be achieved, the scheme should be a model for the Government to follow.

12.57 pm

Mr. Christopher Chope (Christchurch): The hon. Member for Brent, North (Mr. Gardiner) spoke for about 25 minutes on school sport, but he did not emphasise the key benefits of school sport, which are self-discipline, teamwork and self-esteem and the importance of working within an environment where there are rules.

Mr. Gardiner: That was the point of my speech.

Mr. Chope: If the hon. Gentleman intended to make that point, it is a pity that he did not also pay tribute to organisations such as the Rugby Football Union and all the parents and volunteers who work to provide sport for young people outside the school curriculum.

This is the 15th Queen's Speech to have been delivered since I have been a Member of Parliament and I think that it is the worst that I have heard. It may be written on vellum, but much of its language is an insult to the Queen's English. Whatever happened to plain speaking? I illustrate my point by quoting from one paragraph:

"My Government will make a decision on whether to recommend entry into the single currency on the basis of the assessment of the Five Economic Tests to be completed by next June."

I think that means that the Government will decide whether to recommend to keep or scrap the pound and that the outcome of that will depend not on the "Five Economic Tests", which have now been given capital letters, but on whether the Government think that they can pull the wool over the eyes of the British electorate and win a referendum. It is a pity that they did not spell that out more clearly in the Queen's Speech.

Many of the legislative proposals owed more to the Government's need to be seen to be doing something than to the substance of the legislation. My hon. Friend the Member for Ashford (Mr. Green) made a telling point when he described the measures in the Queen's Speech as tough-sounding but hollow gimmicks.

The speech also contains an odd set of priorities. The Government identify the need to introduce a Bill to allow for the retrial of those acquitted of serious offences, but that is a specialised matter that might involve only one or two cases. When we consider the Bill in detail, we will realise that hard cases make bad law. We need to bring more offenders to trial in the first place. We are not dealing with double jeopardy because so few offenders and criminals are subject even to single jeopardy. Bringing them to trial should be our priority. We know that only nine out of every 100 recorded crimes result in a conviction. We need not more legislation to sort out that problem, but more determination by the Government to allow the police to operate effectively.

Last Sunday, the Prime Minister announced the Queen's Speech to readers of *The Observer* under the rather grandiose title, "My vision for Britain". Probably much of the language in the speech results from the fact that it had to fit in with his rather odd use of language in the article. He said:

"Crime and anti-social behaviour is a Labour issue. In many of the poorest parts of Britain, in many traditional Labour areas, it is the issue . . . If people walk out of their doors and are confronted by abuse, vandalism and anti-social behaviour, they will never feel secure."

I have news for the Prime Minister. The issue is not only an issue in Labour areas, it affects places up and down the country. Criminal damage, threatening and insulting behaviour and vandalism erode communities everywhere and they destroy the quality of life and undermine people's self-confidence in their ability to go where they wish to go. It is the issue in Christchurch, which is not a traditional Labour area. However, it is very traditional area and, possibly, a traditional Conservative area, but it has just as much need of policemen as Sedgefield or any other Labour constituency.

I am worried by the implication in the Prime Minister's article that he is preoccupied with Labour areas and that he is intent on engaging in more pork-barrel politics by reducing the police grant in counties such as Dorset and forcing up the council tax burden on residents who already pay more for the costs of the police than those who live anywhere else in the country. As my hon. Friend the Member for Upminster (Angela Watkinson) will realise, even the ordinary citizens of London are not required to contribute as much towards the cost of the police as the people of Christchurch.

In the article, the Prime Minister recognised that the problem with the system is that the police are not "freed up and given the flexibility to focus on the crime and anti-social behaviour".

If that is the problem—I agree that it is—the Government can solve it without the need for yet more specific legislation. Why will they not let the police get on with their job? The police are bombarded with performance indicators and, as a retired senior police officer told me earlier this week, that is at the expense of performance. The Government are not interested in the overall performance and effectiveness of the police, but only in particular indicators.

Why should the police have to identify the race, colour and creed of the people they stop and search? Surely they should be given the responsibility to stop and search the people they believe to be suspects. Street crime should be tackled everywhere, not just in a few specified target areas. The street crime initiative has resulted in the relocation of crime rather than in its elimination.

[Mr. Chope]

Yesterday evening, I was at a function that was addressed by a Minister who is a Member of the other place. I sat next to a gentleman who had that very day been robbed in Leicester square. The robber got away and the victim had to queue for three hours at the local police station to report the crime. Two points arise out of that. First, there is an enormous amount of street crime. That is why people have to queue for three hours at a police station—so many other people are reporting a crime. Secondly, the system contains a built-in inconvenience factor that discourages victims of crime from reporting it. I have encountered that: my car was vandalised—the window was broken—and I tried to report the incident by telephone, but it was impossible to do so. I had the repair done under my insurance policy. The only way I could have reported the incident so that it appeared in the statistics was if a police officer came to my house, or I queued up at the local police station. If the Government are as keen to

"safeguard the interests of victims"

as the Queen's Speech says they are, they should allow victims to report crimes by e-mail, fax or telephone, 24 hours a day.

The Queen's Speech makes extensive reference to truancy, although as my hon. Friend the Member for Ashford said, the Government have manifestly failed to meet their own targets in that respect. I was worried when the Secretary of State said this morning that there is to be a Government advertising campaign against truancy. Who will be the target of that campaign? Will it be the same target as for most Government campaigns—the middle classes, to make them feel confident that the Government are doing something?

I hope that the Government's campaign will provide better value for money than was got for the £49 million spent in one month—March—last year, just before the general election. That spending was a wholly ineffectual and improper use of taxpayers' money on Government propaganda, mainly relating to benefit fraud. If the Government have money to spend on an anti-truancy advertising campaign, why do they not instead give the money to local schools to spend as they see fit? If the schools want to spend it on advertising in local papers, they can do so. In any event, I doubt that the advertising will be targeted on truants; it will be targeted on the middle classes, who are worried about the Government's failure to deliver.

I was extremely disappointed by the Secretary of State's woolly response to my intervention about the right to learn. In September 2001—more than a year ago—figures provided by the National Union of Teachers showed that four out of every five teachers believed that behaviour in schools was getting worse. The number of assaults on teachers rose fourfold in the three years from 1998, yet the right hon. Gentleman made it appear that he was still thinking about what to do to give pupils in classrooms the right to learn without disruption from other pupils who are not interested in learning. I think that that is a much more important issue than truancy: I am more concerned about those who choose to attend school but then have their education disrupted by the badly behaved element than about those who wilfully do not go to school at all.

The Queen's Speech states:

"Legislation will be brought forward to reform the broadcasting and telecommunications industry by promoting competition and investment and giving powers to the Office of Communications."

I submit that that legislation should abolish both the BBC as we know it and the television tax. In that way, we will secure proper, fair and equal competition. The BBC has abused the privileges given to it by Parliament and it should be brought to book. I am horrified that the Government will not even impose the burden of the regulator on the BBC.

Mr. David Rendel (Newbury): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Chope: No, because I am about to sit down and many others want to participate in the debate.

To conclude, this was an extremely disappointing Queen's Speech.

1.8 pm

Mr. John Grogan (Selby): More than 80 years ago, Lloyd George proclaimed to the House of Commons that the country was facing three great enemies: the Hun, the Austrians and the drink, and the greatest of these was the drink. It was according to such sentiments that the liquor licensing laws that have lasted us almost a century were designed. It is a matter of quiet celebration that, today, the Government are to publish the alcohol and entertainment Bill, which will finally call time—last orders—on Lloyd George's liquor licensing laws. To the hon. Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson), who has just left the Chamber, I say that one of the many benefits of reforming the liquor licensing laws will be that it will be much easier to attract big international events such as the Olympics to our capital city.

My first fact-finding trip on being elected to Parliament in 1997 was made to Scotland with a group of English Members of Parliament. We went to Edinburgh with one mission: to compare and contrast the liquor licensing laws. It was a hard business. One Scottish licensee looked pityingly at us and remarked, "Even Cinderella was allowed to stay up until midnight." The Bill will give the House the first opportunity that it has had since the 1970s radically to reform our liquor licensing laws. In the 1970s, Scotland, following the Claydon report, diverged from the practice in England and Wales. Lord Erroll's report—sadly, he died last year—which promised flexibility and liberalisation, was rejected by the House.

I have been asked, "Why will it be different this time? Why will the Government reform the liquor licensing laws during this decade?" Cynical observers of the House would say that during the 1970s the largest all-party group was the all-party temperance group; today it is the all-party beer group. However, that is not the main reason why the Bill will take its place on the statute book. I think that it will be enacted because of the attitude of the police. There are very few chief constables who do not support reform, and for good reasons. About 50 per cent. of all violent person-to-person crime in most of our towns and cities occurs at closing time, at 11 o'clock, and at 2 o'clock. In some instances,

thousands of people spill out on to the streets looking for fast food, kebabs, taxis and buses all at the same time. That is when a great deal of trouble occurs.

We do not have to look to exotic places to find the evidence that reform and more flexibility can help. For example, it would stop people drinking against the clock during the last half an hour before closing time. The Isle of Man does not necessarily have the most liberal of reputations in the world, but in 2001 it reformed its liquor licensing laws, largely on the grounds that the Government are proposing. There was a 40 per cent. reduction in violent crime immediately during the hours of darkness. That is an example that we could well follow.

Some of my right hon. and hon. Friends will remember that during the run-up to the last election, our younger supporters—the sort of people who appeared in "The Project" last week—received text messages on their mobile phones, saying, "If you don't give a 4X for the liquor licensing laws, vote Labour on Thursday." That approach clearly failed, in the sense that young people did not rush to the polls. However, it was a mistake for another reason. It gave the impression that reform of the liquor licensing laws was solely in the interests of the young. If that were the only benefit, it would be wasted on the young. The young will always find ways to party and to have a good time, whatever the hour of the day.

There are three reasons why, for the comfortably middle aged and the old codgers—I look round the Chamber and quite a few of us fit into that category—liquor licensing reform is a good thing. The first reason—I have already referred to it—is public order. It is noticeable that there is much greater flexibility in the new arrangements to deal with problem pubs. In the past, the only way to deal with them was to close them down. That was the only action that magistrates could take. There will be much more flexibility and many more sanctions in the new Bill. Many people will appreciate that. People will find it easier to complain to councils rather than to magistrates.

The second benefit is that a much more family friendly atmosphere will be promoted by the Bill. Children will have greater access to pubs, with proper controls and restrictions. The previous Government introduced children's certificates, which for the first time allowed children into many sections of pubs. However, it was an over-bureaucratic although well-intentioned system. I think that the new Bill will try to change our culture in England and Wales. I hope that it will lead to a much more family friendly atmosphere. That would encourage a more sensible attitude to alcohol.

The third advantage to the whole community is that, I hope, many more different sorts of licensed premises will stay open after 11 o'clock, and perhaps open at other times of the day. There is a pub in my constituency that wants to open to serve breakfasts to those on the night shift, for example. At present, if a pub wishes to stay open after 11 o'clock, it is necessary to make more noise than before 11 o'clock. It is necessary to have a dance floor and entertainment. That is clearly ridiculous. The traditional village pub has much to gain from liberalisation. It will be able to stay open for an hour or perhaps a couple of hours longer, if it is a well run pub, especially at weekends.

All councils and all local police forces need to manage the night-time economy more. It is interesting that of the crime and disorder partnerships, only about a third have a strategy towards alcohol and alcohol-related crime. Home Office guidance should insist that that they all do. The debate about magistrates will rumble on, but it is important to remember that they have a role in the new system. Appeals on liquor licensing, on points of fact as well as points of law, will be made to them. To clarify the position, councils are responsible and, after all, were responsible for much of the public entertainment licence system under the old regime.

Moving swiftly to the communications Bill, by far the most interesting thing I have done in Parliament was to serve on Lord Puttnam's Committee. I can truly say that, unlike in many Committees that the Whips put me on, I listened to virtually every word, partly because I was sitting next to Marmaduke Hussey, who is a good Conservative supporter of the BBC, by contrast with the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope), whose speech I enjoyed. Whenever Lord Hussey had a point to make, he would prod me with his stick to test it out on me before making it to the Committee. That kept my attention—I learned a lot from him and other members of the Committee. The Government have accepted about 120 of our recommendations.

I agree with two aspects of the Bill but, to keep life interesting, I disagree with another. I agree with the Government's stance on the BBC; it is right that the BBC is under Ofcom for tier 1—consideration of taste and decency—and that when it makes mistakes it should pay fines for the first time, as Lord Puttnam's Committee recommended. It is right that it is subject to quotas on regional production and production by independent producers under tier 2 of regulation. However, the backstop powers in tier 3, which deals with whether the BBC is fulfilling its public service remit, should ultimately be up to the governors and the Secretary of State. Otherwise, if the BBC did not fulfil that remit, the new regulator Ofcom, which is designed to provide a light-touch regulation for commercial public service broadcasters, would be trying to deal with the problem. Every commercial broadcaster around would protest to Ofcom about every schedule change and argue that the BBC was departing from its remit.

If we value the BBC—I still think that the majority of Members do—we must accept that the Government's proposed arrangements are right. The Government would do well to look again at Lord Puttnam's proposals on the importance of ensuring the regional nature of ITV. It is generally accepted that we will get one ITV again—a new merged ITV will be able to compete much better, which I welcome. However, we must maintain the regional character of ITV, which has served it well over the decades. We suggested to the Committee that instead of Ofcom requiring a "suitable amount" of regional production by ITV companies, such production should be "substantial". The Government would do well to look at that and consider whether ITV's programme remit should include a regional element, as that is not specified at the moment.

Finally, the Government have introduced radical proposals to allow for the first time non-European Union ownership of our media companies, and permit Rupert Murdoch and anyone else with a substantial interest in our national media to own a terrestrial

[Mr. John Grogan]

station, Channel 5. I looked hard to see where those ideas came from. In the Government's consultation on media ownership few organisations advocated such changes in ownership regimes. The only two that I could find were News International and Andersen's, which said that

"the prevention of foreign ownership is an irrelevant anachronism."

Well, Andersen's has become the irrelevant anachronism in the intervening period.

There was not a great deal of support for the Government's proposals. The hon. Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford (Mr. Whittingdale), the Opposition spokesman, produced a pamphlet in the mid 1990s advocating such changes, but I discovered few other sources backing the changes. I believe that Rupert Murdoch and BSkyB have done a great deal for British television, but putting more power in the hands of one person so that he can run *The Sun*, *The Sunday Times*, *The Times*, BSkyB and Channel 5 under a single ownership—a move that previous Governments have rejected—will create unease and disquiet among Labour Back Benchers. The good news is that he does not even want it. Rupert Murdoch said last week, after the BSkyB annual general meeting, that he had no interest in acquiring a terrestrial TV station, so even if the move goes ahead, it is not at all certain that he wants Channel 5. If the idea is to get him onside for the euro referendum, it is clearly a price that he is not demanding. I urge the Government to consider the matter further.

One of the most problematic effects of allowing changes in ownership regimes and allowing American ownership of our media companies may be in the radio sector. The Clear channel in the United States has benefited from deregulation there. It now owns half of the radio stations in the US and is poised to move into Britain. It has destroyed local radio in the US. There is no more local news and no more local presentation; that is all done centrally. That is the agenda of some of the big American media companies. One does not have to be anti-American to point that out. I hope that at the very least, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State promised yesterday, she will strengthen some of the content regulations that govern local radio.

Finally, I shall say a word about higher education. Students are avid consumers of television, radio and alcohol in pubs, so they link all the remarks that I have made. Labour Members await with great interest the higher education paper. I share some of the reservations expressed today about the introduction of top-up fees. I fear that if a university such as Oxford brought in top-up fees, some poorer students would still go there because they would be able to get bursaries, if they could understand the bursary system—presumably, each university would have a different one; richer students would still go there, if they could afford the fees and were indifferent to them; but a great many people in the middle would be deterred, and the fees would affect their choices.

The introduction of top-up fees would be extremely divsive and would do little to increase participation. If there must be a greater contribution from students, there would be greater support from Labour Members for a deferred payment system, as there is in Scotland. I noted on 3 November that *The Independent on Sunday* stated that the idea originated from Lord Jenkins, which does not increase enthusiasm for the idea. *The Sunday Telegraph* on the same day noted that the current Chancellor, the current Secretary of State for Education and Skills, and the current Home Secretary had reservations. Many Labour Members—

Mr. Rendel: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Grogan: I am about to conclude my remarks.

Many Labour Members hope that the current Chancellor, the current Education Secretary and the current Home Secretary, rather than our Chancellor from the 1960s, will prevail in the argument.

1.22 pm

Mr. Nick Gibb (Bognor Regis and Littlehampton): I am usually a pessimist as regards the British state education system. Having been at various state schools for all but two years in my education, I saw at first hand some of the best that the state sector has to offer, and over the years, some of the less good. I have listened to speeches by successive Education Secretaries with increasing gloom, both since and before 1997, but the appointment of the current Secretary of State has filled me with optimism. He was quoted in *The Sunday Times* last week as saying that the reason for the lack of Oxbridge places for students from comprehensive schools was the inverted snobbery of many comprehensives, rather than real snobbery at Oxford and Cambridge.

That is encouraging, because I am sure that it is true. More than that, it is the first hint from any Secretary of State that I have heard that the root of the problem with our state education system is the ethos of many of our schools, rather than the structure of the education system. It is an ethos that has been handed down in teacher training colleges since the mid-1960s and probably even before that, and as a result, the education establishment has come to be dominated by people with a specific outlook on the world. It is an outlook that believes in concepts such as teaching children how to learn, instead of actually teaching them. It is an outlook that eschews competition between children, decries tough discipline, rejects streaming by ability in favour of mixed-ability teaching, and ridicules the public school ethos. It is an outlook that is failing children.

The measures in the Gracious Speech to increase the penalties for parents of truants are welcome, but they deal only with the symptoms of the problem rather than the root cause. A study by Professor O'Keeffe in 1993 asked pupils why they stayed away from school, and the most frequent answer was to avoid subjects that they found too hard or teachers whom they did not like. A recent OECD report "Education at a Glance: Indicators 2002" concludes that one in four British 15-year-olds said that their lessons were blighted by noise and disruption, and more than half the pupils surveyed said that they were bored by their lessons.

In a fascinating study carried out by the National Institute of Economic and Social Research last year, three local education authority inspectors specialising in English and a chief inspector visited 20 different literacy

classes across the age range in the Zurich, St Gallen and Aargau cantons in Switzerland. The report concluded that fluency in reading, oral discussion and writing

"were all significantly higher for the majority of Swiss youngsters at the end of compulsory schooling than for their counterparts in England."

Even more dramatic were the differences at the lower end of the attainment scale.

The report concluded that

"Swiss lower-attainment pupils at age 14 are close to our average pupils at that age in their literacy attainment."

Revealingly, it found that

"there was no truancy, not even in the lowest ability group . . . while the corresponding low-attaining class in England would suffer . . . high absence rates",

as it is not unusual for one third to be absent.

I support the Government's measures to increase the penalties for parents of truants, but they do not deal with the causes of truancy. They are being tough on truancy, but they do nothing about the causes of truancy.

The truth is that many youngsters are simply let down by the education system, to such an extent that they feel humiliated in class when they cannot keep up. A quarter of 11-year-olds cannot read properly by the time they leave primary school, that has a knock-on effect at secondary level and they fall further and further behind. No wonder such children become disruptive, are bored and ultimately stay away from school.

What we should be asking ourselves is not how nasty we can be to parents, but what is going on in our primary and secondary schools that is resulting in such poor achievement. At this point I expect the Minister for School Standards to leap up and ask whether I have read the OECD programme for the international student assessment survey—PISA—which shows that of 32 countries, the UK ranks seventh in reading, eighth in maths and fourth in science. That is an incredible result given the widespread concern about education in Britain. Surely, he will say, that proves that all is well with our education system.

I have read that report in great detail and it is incredible. It is particularly incredible because in the previous year a far more authoritative study—the third international maths and science study, conducted by the respected International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement—put the UK 20th out of 41 countries, just two places ahead of Lithuania. The IAEEA has been conducting such surveys since 1970.

According to Professor Prais of the National Institute for Economic and Social Research, the TIMSS survey shows the UK to be some 40 points on average behind Switzerland, France, the Czech Republic and Hungary, whereas PISA puts the UK 20 points ahead of those same countries, and all that achievement occurred in just one year.

We must therefore somehow take account of the 60-point discrepancy between the two surveys. Why did the two surveys, one carried out in 1999 and the other in 2000, come to such radically different conclusions? The answer is not that there was some miraculous alchemic improvement in education, but that there were significant errors in the way in which the PISA study was carried out.

The international surveys test a sample of youngsters in each of the different countries involved. Over the years the TIMSS survey has come up with tried and tested criteria that PISA, the new study, did not follow. The most significant criterion relates to the type of question asked. The TIMSS study consisted of questions common to the school curriculum in each country, but the PISA survey directly states:

"PISA assessed young people's capacity to use their knowledge and skills in order to meet real life challenges, rather than merely looking at how well they had mastered a specific school curriculum."

In other words, the PISA test is more one of common sense or IQ, so it is not surprising that British school pupils did so much better in it than in the test that measured the actual effects of the education system. No one is saying that British school children are any less bright than those in other countries, nor do they have any less common sense, but a survey that measures only what the PISA test measured is pointless in terms of assessing the education system.

There are a number of other differences between the two surveys. TIMSS tested 13 and 14-year-olds, whereas PISA tested 15 and 16-year-olds. The fact that many pupils at the latter age will be leaving school creates disparities, especially on the continent. PISA also tested the age groups rather than the classes. As children in most of Europe are held back a year if they do not achieve certain standards, a bias against continental countries is again created.

UK Participation in the test was very low in comparison with that in other countries. From the original sample selected, only 61 per cent. of UK schools agreed to participate, in comparison with 95 per cent. in France, Germany and Switzerland. The proportion of pupils who agreed to take part in the test once their school had agreed to participate was, at 81 per cent., the lowest in any of the countries. Taking those two types of non-response rates together, the UK had a response rate of only 48 per cent. of the original sample, compared with 90 per cent. in France, Germany and Switzerland. Common sense would suggest that it is the weaker schools and pupils who would refuse to participate.

The Minister for School Standards needs to be careful when he cites the PISA report with such a flourish, as he has done on several occasions. One of the things that the public dislike about politicians is our constant use of statistics to try to prove our party political point. They do not believe us when we use them, especially when they run counter to people's daily experience or common sense. I know that the Secretary of State is sincere in his desire to change the way in which we conduct politics in this country. I admire him for that, so I urge him to look carefully at the PISA report before continuing the habit of his colleagues and previous Ministers of citing figures that are misleading and truly incredible.

Even without Professor Prais's painstaking analysis of the PISA survey, it is clear that it is flawed. Why else would the public be so concerned about the condition of state education? Why else are people so desperate to move into the catchment areas of the dwindling numbers of good state schools?

[Mr. Nick Gibb]

The Minister should also exercise caution when making, as he often does, claims such as this:

"Primary schools have made outstanding progress in raising standards over the last five years . . . 75 per cent. of 11-year-olds achieve the expected level in English".—[*Official Report*, 24 October 2002; Vol. 391, c. 400.]

Those statistics appear absolutely remarkable, especially in the context of 1995, when only 48 per cent. of 11-year-olds achieved the expected level in English. They appear so remarkable that Professor Tymms of Durham university's curriculum, evaluation and management centre was forced to ponder how they had arisen. He said:

"At face value, the improvement in the SATS is an amazing rise in standards. It would be better than any rise which has been seen through any policy in the world which has been properly evaluated. When you see something like that, you have to pause for a minute and say is it real or not."

Unfortunately, the reality is that, as Professor Tymms puts it,

"the children are getting no better. It's just that our staff are better at teaching to the test".

Professor Tymms knows that that is the case—it is not merely conjecture on his part—because his curriculum, evaluation and management centre has conducted its own tests, taken by 5,000 year 6 children in the same 122 primary schools every year since 1997. Unlike the SATS tests, those so-called PIPS tests are the same each year and teachers do not prepare their children for them. Those tests reveal no statistically significant improvement in children's literacy since 1997.

The Times Educational Supplement suggested cognitive ability tests, which are a form of IQ test that some secondary schools administer to their year 7 intake as a basis for assessing the school's value-added performance. However much educational standards rise, in theory, the CAT scores should stay roughly the same. No one claims that British pupils are becoming innately cleverer; the Minister for School Standards and others simply say that they are improving in English and maths.

However, according to *The Times Educational Supplement*:

"What has actually happened is that CAT scores have risen in recent years alongside national test results".

Professor Tymms is therefore right to say that

"children are getting better and better at taking tests",

but that their overall literacy and numeracy is not improving.

I cite that damning evidence neither to run down our education system in party political fashion so that I can conclude that if only the Tories were in power, everything would be great, nor to criticise teachers, who work enormously hard and conscientiously. My anxiety stems from the fact that our state education system has been in decline for the best part of 40 years. We shall not begin to remedy it until we consider the facts honestly and objectively.

We must eschew all the interest groups: the education establishment, the trade unions, right-wingers, left-wingers, Ministers and Opposition. Let us not try to hide what is going on with newly devised and flawed international comparisons or by trying to downgrade hallmark standards that inconveniently highlight inadequacies in our education system.

Once we have an honest understanding of the state of our education system, we can consider what happens in our schools and determine what needs to change. Are the teaching methods at fault? Are the low expectations that the Secretary of State emphasised in his speech on the 10th anniversary of Ofsted to blame? Are there too many mixed-ability classes? Are we using the right methods to teach children to read? Is the configuration of primary school classrooms right? Is there enough discipline? Should we exclude more pupils? If so, where should they go?

What do the best performing countries, such as Switzerland, do? Why is there no truancy in Switzerland but massive truancy in Britain? Why do some schools do so much better than others with similar socio-economic intakes? Why does one primary school in a specific area do well in SATs in English but poorly in maths, while only a mile away, a similar school does well in maths and poorly in English?

Most importantly, is there something in the ethos of the top 50 state schools that the rest can adopt? Is there something in the operation of the top private schools that the state sector can emulate?

The PISA report reaches some interesting conclusions about teaching methods and ethos. It states that among the factors that have a

"positive and statistically significant association with student performance"

are the

"disciplinary climate of the classroom; and the extent to which teachers emphasise academic performance and place high demands on students".

I commend the documentary "Second Chance", by Trevor Philips, to hon. Members. It involved Ryan Williams, a black 15-year-old boy who was described as "rude, disruptive and unmanageable" in a report by his inner-city comprehensive in Putney. In the programme, he was moved to Downside boarding school in Somerset. Channel Four paid the fees. Ryan is currently studying for 10 GCSEs at his new school. He came top of his class in Latin and biology and is a leading member of the school rugby team. His report card puts him in the top third of pupils at the school.

Labour Members could argue that the improvement in Ryan's behaviour was due to the resources and smaller classes at the private school. Clearly, those aspects help. However, Ryan puts it down to the ethos of his adopted school with its stress on staff-student interaction and mutual respect. As Trevor Philips says:

"New Labour should concentrate less on 'dissing' public schools and ask how they can give excluded children an experience that is currently only available to the wealthy".

Our education system is Britain's biggest problem today. High truancy, ill disciplined classes and poor literacy have major repercussions in increasing yobbish behaviour. A skills survey by Business in the Community published in October reports business as saying that school leavers turn up late to interviews and are improperly dressed, incapable of holding a conversation and poorly informed about business and world affairs. Businesses express concern over the lack of basic skills among school leavers, while universities

complain that students starting a maths degree with a good A-level maths grade need remedial teaching before they can start the course.

Those concerns will have a long-term impact on the economic well-being both of Britain and of the individuals whom the state has let down. If we do not tackle the ethos in our state schools, we shall let down millions of youngsters, particularly those from the low socio-economic groups. It is time, I believe, to stop arguing about structures such as the role and responsibility of local education authorities, grammar schools versus comprehensives, specialist schools and city technology colleges. We have been arguing over them and changing those structures for decades, with few beneficial results.

We need absolute concentration by everyone on standards, not on trying to prove that standards are improving when the public know that they are not. That is old politics and people are fed up with it, whichever party is involved. We need a serious commitment to improving standards. It is easy for Ministers to confine their activities to changing structures, but we need a serious examination of what is being taught, and how. That is what parents want, and it is what all of us in the House who are genuinely concerned about our education system should want as well.

1.41 pm

Mr. Kevan Jones (North Durham): I welcome the inclusion of licensing law reform in the Queen's Speech. I am a former chair of public health and development in Newcastle who was responsible for administering our shambolic system, so I think that the proposals are sensible ones that will bring our licensing laws into modern settings, which we all welcome.

My hon. Friend the Member for Selby (Mr. Grogan) mentioned the history of our licensing laws, but I went a little further back to find that the first law, which covered the supply of alcohol and its purity, was introduced in the 13th century. Then, there was a gap for a few hundred years in which little legislation was passed. Over the summer, I read a very good biography of Georgina, Duchess of Devonshire. Clearly, the election of Charles James Fox to this place suggests that there was little control over the supply of alcohol in the City of London.

The basis of the current legislation was introduced in the 19th century. Since then, the law has been built up piecemeal, which has been the problem. There has never been a comprehensive reform of licensing laws in this country, which is why the Bill will make history when it reaches the statute book. The law that provides that people must be 18 to drink in public houses was introduced in 1923, but we still have anachronisms such as the fact that 16 and 17-year-olds can drink cider with a meal in a public house.

When I was a councillor, I welcomed the publication of the 2000 White Paper, "Time for Reform". Indeed, it has been welcomed overall by those who administer licensing and by the trade, and I think that the Bill will receive a similar welcome from the general public.

We must not underestimate the entertainment industry's importance to this country's economy, as about 90 per cent. of the population drink alcohol regularly and 175,000 public houses, clubs, bars and other outlets serve alcohol. Also, we should not forget that the industry employs about 1 million people. Our tourism industry, which is also based largely on entertainment, contributes about £75 billion a year to the economy.

In Newcastle, I saw the advantages of the entertainment industry in terms of regeneration. Hon. Members might care to visit Newcastle's new quayside to see the vibrancy of that area, much of which is due to the inclusion of bars, cafes and restaurants in the redevelopment. So, what is wrong with the law as it stands? A lot, I would say: it is complex and inconsistent, as more than 40 licences and permissions may be involved in serving alcohol or holding entertainment in licensed premises.

A well-known example is the two-in-the-bar rule, which is connected with public entertainment licences. If a pub wishes to put on public entertainment, it first needs a liquor licence under the Licensing Act 1964, which is dispensed by the local magistrate; it then needs a public entertainment licence under the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1982, which is provided by the local authority. However, there is a caveat in section 182 of the 1964 Act, which provides that pubs do not need a public entertainment licence for live performances by two or fewer musicians. Thus a licence is required for a string quartet, but not for two individuals with loud amplifiers. That shows the nonsense of that law.

There are other examples that show why licensing needs to be reformed. First, it is illegal for a police officer who is off duty and on his way home, but still in uniform, to buy a bottle of wine in an off-licence. Secondly, it is illegal for two friends to engage in quarrelsome behaviour in licensed premises. Thirdly and more remarkably, if a bottle of homemade wine is given as a tombola prize at a village fete, a liquor licence is required. More remarkable still is the fact that it is illegal, the House will be pleased to know, for two prostitutes to drink together in a public house, whereas one can drink there alone.

When people discuss the sale and control of alcohol, they usually concentrate on the protection of children. The present laws do not protect children at all. An adult can go out and buy an alcoholic drink in a pub, return to the beer garden and give it to a child as young as five. Furthermore, booze sold on boats is covered by no legislation, so if a group of 14-year-olds wants to go on a booze cruise down the Thames, they can do so quite legally. I am not having a go at Cambridge university, but it is apparently legal for it and an honourable company of vintners to sell wine without a licence.

The final anomaly that concerns many of my constituents is that there is no provision whatever for local people to have a say in the granting of licences. A magistrate can dispense a licence without taking local people's views into account.

My hon. Friend the Member for Selby mentioned the issues surrounding the 11 o'clock and 2 o'clock closing times, which create more public order problems in major cities than they solve. They also restrict tourism. Our licensing laws bemuse visitors to this country. In a few weeks' time in Newcastle, the annual Scandinavian Viking invasion will take place and will lead up to

[Mr. Kevan Jones]

Christmas. It is difficult to explain to Scandinavians wandering around Newcastle at 11 pm why they cannot get a drink.

I welcome the idea of having one licence for licensed premises. It makes sense because it cuts down on red tape and makes it much easier to manage the system. I also welcome the provision of the personal licence, so that someone in control of a liquor licence will now have to be licensed. That will make matters much easier.

I support the retention of a legal drinking age of 18, but the Minister must be a little wary because under present law 16 and 17-year-olds can drink with meals with their families in licensed premises. That must be taken into account when we consider the Bill in detail.

The issue of flexible opening hours has already been raised. Sadly, the Bill has been portrayed in the press as somehow meaning 24-hour drinking. That is not what will happen. When I was chair of public health in Newcastle, there were two experiments in which we had no licensing hours: we had special licences for the Euro 96 football tournament in the city and for millennium eve. The amount of public disorder on those two occasions was far less than on a normal Friday or Saturday night. In practice, pubs did not open all night; they closed when people went home. Licensed premises will not be open all night without any customers. I do not think that they will be open 24 hours a day in many places.

The transfer of responsibility for liquor licensing to local authorities is controversial. I have already received letters from licensees in my constituency and from J.D. Wetherspoons arguing that that is a retrograde step. I am sorry, but I do not agree. The present system does not work, and we need a system whereby the people that take the decisions are publicly accountable. Like my hon. Friend the Member for West Lancashire (Mr. Pickthall), I was initially in favour of a licensing board made up of councillors, police officers and magistrates, but that would create problems of public accountability. The way forward to deal with people's concerns about local authority responsibility is to lay down clear conditions. We should get the regulations right that give the conditions on which a liquor license may be refused or granted.

I would also make it compulsory for any councillor who serves on a licensing committee to have training, as is the practice in many councils for those on planning committees. Training should be a nationally recognised criterion. I would also ensure that there was an insistence on a political balance on licensing committees.

I hope that the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport will resist the idea that liquor licenses could be refused on sufficiency—that is the numbers in a geographical area. My right hon. Friend the Member for Holborn and St. Pancras (Mr. Dobson) is pushing for that. According to the licensed trade journal, the *Morning Advertiser*, he is concerned about the number of licences in an area, and believes that power should be granted to local authorities to restrict the numbers. That does not work. It was tried in Newcastle for quite a few years, and licensing magistrates in the city centre would not grant new licences. All that happens is a downgrading of what is on offer, and a proliferation of places that serve large volumes of alcohol and what are locally referred to as vertical drinking establishments—after some time, many of the customers are horizontal. It does not lead to the diversity that my hon. Friend the Member for Selby said these changes would introduce. I would strongly resist any such move. The way to manage numbers is to make the enforcement of the operation of those premises as tough as possible.

An omission that we should seriously consider is whether to make it compulsory for certain large establishments to have registered door supervisors. That scheme was pioneered in Newcastle, and it worked well in many other council areas.

I would ban the happy hour, which I believe leads to binge drinking. People are forced to drink large amounts of alcohol at a cheap price during a certain period. That leads to problems, and action in the Bill to ban or control that would be welcome.

This reform is long overdue. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Selby, I think that it is centuries overdue. It will bring this country into line with liquor licensing in Europe and elsewhere. It will also bring about responsible drinking. The binge drinking culture in this country does nothing for health and generates public disorder. I welcome the proposals, and I look forward to the Bill making swift progress through the House. I hope that it will help local residents and, more importantly, help an industry that is vital to this country.

1.54 pm

Hugh Robertson (Faversham and Mid-Kent): I have asked to speak about the licensing Bill, because I represent a brewing constituency. Shepherd Neame, which is the oldest family owned brewery in Britain, is based in Faversham. It is a sizeable local employer, and an enormously generous benefactor to many worthy local causes. However, I represent a large rural constituency and my patch contains many country pubs on the north downs and the east Weald. They are desperately concerned about their profitability and any increase in bureaucracy, or costs, would undoubtedly hit them very hard. Many of those pubs are more than simply pubs: they are the focus of village life. If any had to close, a severe blow would be dealt to the rural economy—and once closed, pubs almost never reopen. The Bill is therefore hugely important to a great many of my constituents.

I welcome many of the proposals enormously. The liberalisation of the laws to permit 24-hour opening is long overdue. It is ridiculous that, for many people in London, a night out stops at 11 pm. A night out with the Swale police during the summer recess convinced me of the foolishness of the present arrangement. It is, however, important for appropriate safeguards to be introduced for residents.

I also welcome the extra powers that will enable the police to deal with disorderly premises. This is clearly a public-order issue, which should have been tackled before.

It is also sensible to end many of the anachronisms that exist in the current Act, but I am worried about the transfer of licensing powers from the magistrates courts to local authorities. When it was trailed in the White Paper, we held a forum at the brewery in Faversham.

We invited many local authority representatives from all over Kent. They generally favoured the proposal, but an overwhelming majority of publicans and representatives of the brewery industry were firmly set against it. As the Secretary of State will know, 70,000 licensees were asked about the proposal in a poll conducted in September by a licensing magazine. A staggering 94 per cent. supported the retention of control by magistrates.

While I recognise that the current system is not perfect, it enjoys the support and confidence of the country's licensees. They also have a number of specific anxieties, with which I hope the Secretary of State will deal. The first concerns independence. Magistrates are independent of local politics and constituency pressures. Like many other Members throughout the House, I write regularly to local authorities to try and influence decisions; I would not dream of writing in the same way to magistrates.

Local authorities also have a valid role in objecting to licences or their conditions. They cannot be both judge and jury. The loss of a licence often leads to loss of livelihood. I am not a lawyer, but a lawyer told me that the granting of this power to local authorities would have important indications for human rights.

There is also the question of local knowledge. Good licensing requires knowledge of local criminals and their haunts. Magistrates have such knowledge, but I am afraid that council officials do not. Then there is the question of respect. Licensees have great respect for the courts, to which they are ultimately answerable. If the contents of my mailbag are anything to go by, I must say that, sadly, that is not true of local authorities.

Speed is essential in the event of sudden changes caused by the death of a licensee or by the licensee's taking up a new occupation, or by unpredictable occasions such as celebrations, sporting replays or rescheduling. Magistrates can make decisions quickly—it is, after all, their job—but local authorities generally do not, at least according to my experience of the planning system.

Bureaucracy is another issue. The White Paper has given each pub the task of producing an operating plan. Apart from the expense, the extra form filling will be detested by publicans. Good pubs, which we do not want to penalise, will of course comply; bad pubs, almost inevitably, will not, and it will take a huge amount of extra time and effort to track them down.

There is the question of music, as is demonstrated by early-day motion 1182, signed by 233 Members during the last Session. And, of course, there is the question of costs. Magistrates currently administer the licensing system for a fee of £10 a year. The new fee has yet to be announced, but I cannot imagine that it will match that amount.

I welcome much of the Bill, but I have serious reservations about the proposal to transfer licensing from magistrates to local authorities. Magistrates are quick, generally consistent, cost-effective, independent and impartial; they understand crime and local criminals; and, critically, they have the huge respect of licensees.

I go back to the survey: 94 per cent. of licensees want to keep the current system of magistrates licensing. It is a powerful endorsement. I urge the Government to take notice of it when formulating the proposals.

2 pm

Mr. John Whittingdale (Maldon and East Chelmsford): We have had a wide-ranging and well-informed debate. A number of the contributions have been on education, the first subject on the Order Paper. Perhaps that is unsurprising given the crisis that now afflicts our education system, yet all the Queen's Speech has to offer to improve the education system is a promise to bring forward proposals for reform of universities, a commitment that most people seem to believe will turn out to be the introduction of top-up fees.

I shall not repeat the many excellent points that were made by my hon. Friend the Member for Ashford (Mr. Green). My hon. Friend the Member for Bognor Regis and Littlehampton (Mr. Gibb) also made an extremely well informed and thoughtful speech. While it is not for me to comment, I hope that the Secretary of State and, indeed, my hon. Friend the Member for Ashford will study carefully the speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Bognor Regis and Littlehampton, because his arguments were persuasive.

The hon. Member for Hemel Hempstead (Mr. McWalter) was right to express some disappointment that the Secretary of State did not spend more time talking about the Government's policies and less time asking questions of the Opposition parties, but that perhaps is an indication of the dearth of thinking on the Government side on the subject of education.

The hon. Gentleman told us of the unfortunate fire that took place in his constituency office last night. We are glad that it was brought under control. We noted that the Fire Brigades Union chief officer went to see him to offer his moral support. It might have been better if the hon. Gentleman had rung up the prospective Conservative parliamentary candidate for his constituency, Mike Penning, who has eight years' experience as a firefighter and may have helped him to put the fire out.

During this debate, no Liberal Democrat Member has mentioned any of the issues covered by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport. That shows the priority that the Liberal Democrats attach to those important issues.

I want to concentrate on the measures in the Queen's Speech that are the responsibility of the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport. Unlike the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, she cannot be accused of doing nothing: she has two substantial Bills, although each is a little late in coming. It was clear that there would need to be further legislation dealing with the ownership rules and regulation of the media almost before the last Broadcasting Bill passed on to the statute book in 1996.

I once wrote a pamphlet on media ownership laws and I was extremely flattered that the hon. Member for Selby (Mr. Grogan) appears to have read it. He is a member of a rather small but well informed group and I congratulate him on having managed to get hold of the pamphlet. It is something of an embarrassment to discover that the liberalisation of the rules that I argued for strongly at that time is finally being enacted by the Government. I have no hesitation in welcoming the broad thrust of the new Bill. We strongly support its provisions to allow greater cross-media ownership,

[Mr. John Whittingdale]

consolidation and foreign investment and to move towards a regime where the media industries are treated under the same competition rules as other industries.

I was particularly pleased and surprised when the Government reversed their declared policy of retaining the bar on non-European ownership of our broadcasting companies. I was even more heartened when the Government stuck to their guns and resisted the calls of the Joint Scrutiny Committee that considered the Communications Bill to reverse their position. I have no doubt that the issue of foreign ownership will be much debated in the coming months, but we will support the Government in their robustly pro-market position.

The Government have shown an encouraging willingness to move still further in the direction of a competitive market in broadcasting. We welcome yesterday's announcement by the Secretary of State that the Government intend to allow an even greater relaxation of the local ownership rules. We will support the right hon. Lady in that. Indeed, we might even press her to go a little further. We also hope that her open-minded approach to the Bill will continue and that she will perhaps consider other areas for greater liberalisation, such as the rules governing the ownership of ITN, the restrictions on cross-media ownership and the disqualification of religious broadcasters. However, lest I give the impression that we can all agree on the Bill and that therefore it will complete its passage through the Standing Committee in just a few hours, let me say that it requires close and detailed scrutiny.

There is one area in which we strongly disagree with the Government's approach. Whatever consolidations and takeovers take place in the media sectors following the passage of the Bill, for the foreseeable future there will remain one broadcaster whose dominant position is likely to remain unchallenged—that is, of course, the BBC. That is because of its dominance, because it is owned by the state and because it is financed by a compulsory poll tax, which is enforced by criminal law. It has obligations and duties which do not apply to any other broadcaster. It has a public service remit and it is subject to strict controls on its commercial activities, yet unlike other broadcasters, responsibility for ensuring that it meets the requirements upon it and for adjudicating on complaints about its activities rests not with the new regulator, but with its own board of governors. Yet the BBC is most in need of external accountability and independent adjudication. That need has become more serious as in recent months the BBC has become increasingly powerful and aggressive. At a time when the commercial broadcasting companies are struggling because of the advertising downturn, the BBC is enjoying steadily increasing revenue and is adopting an increasingly aggressive commercial approach. It is competing in the market to buy rights; it is scheduling its most popular programmes with an eye to winning a ratings battle and it is launching new channels and services which in some cases are almost carbon copies of those that are already available commercially.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope) said at the end of his speech, in the past few weeks the debate about the role and financing of the BBC has grown louder and there is an increasing level of discontent among people who do not see why they should be forced to pay for services that they do not necessarily want when they are already paying for services that they do want. The Government first tried to argue that now was not the time for this debate and then appeared to dismiss the alternatives before the debate had even started. The Bill offers an opportunity to begin the debate about the role of public service broadcasting in general and the BBC in particular, and we intend to take that opportunity.

Mr. Rendel: Does the hon. Gentleman agree with me and with the Public Accounts Committee that it is high time the BBC was part of the audit conducted by the National Audit Office and therefore open to inspection by the PAC?

Mr. Whittingdale: I am in favour of the BBC being subject to as much external examination as possible and that is certainly worth considering.

I now turn to the second Bill for which the right hon. Lady is responsible: the alcohol and entertainment licensing Bill, about which there have been a number of contributions today. Having been promised to thousands of first-time voters through text messages in the run-up to the general election, it is good to see that the Bill has finally arrived. Like my hon. Friend the Member for Faversham and Mid-Kent (Hugh Robertson) and the hon. Members for North Durham (Mr. Jones) and for Selby, I broadly welcome the overall thrust of the Bill: to liberalise the existing laws on the licensing and sale of alcohol. However, the Government appear to be trying to have it both ways. They are trying to portray the Bill as a liberalising measure that will be welcomed by young people and at the same time they say that it is part of their strategy for tackling antisocial behaviour. We are willing to accept the Government's claim that allowing flexible opening hours will result in less thuggish behaviour from drunken louts, but we shall want to examine the evidence. We shall also be looking for safeguards for local residents, particularly in areas where there is already a high concentration of late-night drinking establishments.

Mr. Kevan Jones: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Whittingdale: If the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, I have very little time.

We do not believe that the case has been properly made for the decision to transfer the responsibility for issuing licences from magistrates to local authorities. As my hon. Friend the Member for Faversham and Mid-Kent said, many licensees are fearful that the new regime may turn out to be slower, inconsistent, more expensive and more bureaucratic. I was interested in the contribution of the hon. Member for West Lancashire (Mr. Pickthall), which was based on his experience in the Home Office. He talked about a mixed licensing board, and I hope that we will debate that suggestion in the coming months.

The Government have clearly made up their mind on the issue. We shall therefore seek to ensure that a Bill that is supposed to be deregulatory does not end up imposing even more regulation. In particular, the

sensible principle of splitting the licensing of premises from the issue of a licence to a person is severely undermined by requiring the personal licensee to be named on the premises licence. That will mean that, instead of simplifying the existing procedure when a manager changes, it will be just as, if not more, complicated. My hon. Friend the Member for Faversham and Mid-Kent was absolutely right. We will want to be assured that, rather than saving money for the licensee, the new system will not result in a significant increase in costs just when many small public houses are struggling to survive.

We are also concerned that, with the proposal for entertainments licensing, the Government may end up with a more restrictive system than we have now. The hon. Member for North Durham was right to say that the two-in-a-bar rule is widely accepted to be outdated and anomalous, and it has been the subject of a campaign by musicians that has been widely supported in the House. However, the Government are now proposing that an entertainments licence, as part of the premises licence, will be required even for one performer, and the exclusion of the current exemption from the transitional arrangements has raised fears that the Bill will lead to more bureaucracy for those pubs that currently do not need to apply for a licence. Finally, it is clear that the guidance that is to be issued to local authorities will be crucial in assessing the effects of the Bill. I hope therefore that the Secretary of State can assure us that this guidance will be published at the same time as the Bill so that it can be properly scrutinised.

One Bill that had been expected but that is not in the Queen's Speech is the gambling Bill. Following the report of the gambling review body, it has been clear that there is widespread support for reform of the existing laws, many of which are arcane and anomalous. Indeed, the Minister for Sport described them as

"woefully out of date, hard to understand, inflexible and difficult to amend."

He rightly added:

"Businesses are saying that they are being held back".—[*Official Report*, 5 July 2002; Vol. 388, c. 514.]

Yet measures to put that right are absent from the legislative programme. At the very least, the Government should set up a shadow gambling commission, as we have been calling for. It would give the industry confidence and greater certainty about the future.

Once again, there is no mention of perhaps the biggest and most important industry for which the Secretary of State's Department is responsible: the tourism industry. A fortnight ago, she effectively announced the abolition of the English Tourism Council, which has been swallowed up by the British Tourist Authority. It will be interesting to know whether, in due course, that will require legislation, as the ETC was created by statute. Such legislation would allow us to raise our concern that, unlike Scotland and Wales, England now has no national voice. Instead, it appears that these reforms are once again being driven by the Government's regional agenda.

To turn to another failure by the Government to deliver on their promises, where is the Bill to amend the law on charitable purposes to make sport a charitable purpose in its own right? The Government made a clear promise in the 2001 Budget that community and amateur sports clubs would be given mandatory rate relief. Instead, the Government have tried to wriggle out of that promise by suggesting that clubs should apply for charitable status if they could demonstrate that they were promoting community participation in healthy recreation. Yet many clubs do not want to be answerable to the charity commissioners in their internal running, or to take on the extra administrative burden that it entails. The result is that just 334 out of well over 100,000 community and amateur sports clubs have actually applied. The Government should deliver on their promise to deliver mandatory rate relief as part of the Treasury's tax package.

While I am discussing sport, I should congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson). He made a powerful case in support of a 2012 Olympic bid for London. I am also grateful to him for advocating the case of Stratford, which is close to my constituency in Essex, and not the alternative on the other side of London. We share his enthusiasm for the bid. It will need to be credible, with plans for the necessary infrastructure and a well established legacy. We believe that there is a strong case for London to bid for the games, and we hope that the Government will come forward soon with proposals.

I also agree with the hon. Member for Brent, North (Mr. Gardiner), who made a powerful case for more sport in schools. I spent most of my school days trying to avoid playing sport, but I share his wish to have more sport in schools. We agree with him about the importance of that matter.

There is a lot more going on in the Department for Culture, Media and Sport that I would have liked to raise, but I am conscious that, because of the number of contributions to the debate—all of which were well worth listening to—there is no time to do so now. I close by saying merely that the two Bills that the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport has managed to get into the Queen's Speech are welcome, although we shall of course want to examine them closely. It is the absence from the Gracious Speech of any measures to tackle the issues that I have mentioned that is the real mark of the right hon. Lady's and the Government's failure.

2.15 pm

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Tessa Jowell): The debate has been both wide ranging and thoughtful and I pay tribute to hon. Members on both sides of the House who have contributed. I mention in particular the speech of my hon. Friend the Member for West Lancashire (Mr. Pickthall), who emphasised the tremendous success of the Government's policy on free access to museums—a flagship policy that is a direct expression of the Government's commitment to access to excellence for everyone.

The hon. Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Wilkinson) spoke about the Olympics. I note that his complete acceptance of the figures in the Arup report has resulted in his making, on behalf of his party, a £2 billion spending commitment. The Government are considering extremely carefully that report and the case for bidding for the 2012 Olympics. A decision will be made against criteria of affordability, deliverability and

[Tessa Jowell]

legacy. The hon. Gentleman is right about those issues. In the spirit of openness and transparency that we think should characterise that important discussion, there will be a parliamentary debate, if not before Christmas, then certainly before the Government make a decision.

My hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North (Mr. Gardiner) made an excellent speech in which he set out proposals on how to increase the amount of sport played in schools. I will say more about that later.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Selby (Mr. Grogan) on his speech and thank him for his contribution to his work on the Joint Committee. I note his point about the strength of the obligation in the communications Bill in respect of regional broadcasting. No doubt, that will be debated as the Bill passes through its parliamentary stages.

I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for North Durham (Mr. Jones), who has long experience of licensing matters. In connection with the concerns that have been raised, let me underline the fact that the control of the density of licensed premises is a responsibility of both the licensing regime and the planning system.

Like the hon. Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford (Mr. Whittingdale), I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Bognor Regis and Littlehampton (Mr. Gibb) for his extremely thoughtful speech.

I shall concentrate on the points that arise from my Department's responsibility. Several speeches by Opposition Members reminded me of GK Chesterton's words:

"Since Dickens no one in England has cared for the people's pleasure—the Tories hate the people and the Liberals hate pleasure."

As he turns in his grave, Chesterton must be saying, "Thank goodness for a new Labour Government." That point is underlined by the absence of their spokesmen from the Liberal Democrats' Front Bench.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Skills made much of the close working relationship between our Departments. That relationship is important if we are to instil in this country's children and young people a sense of pride and purpose. That sense of talent and creativity being unlocked that sport and the arts can, almost uniquely, bring provides a good example of the way in which participation in sport and creativity is both a means to an end and an end in itself. In the coming year, in 16 of the most deprived parts of the country, creative partnerships will bring the expertise of creative people—sculptors, actors, poets and musicians—into schools to support the curriculum, to improve creativity and to raise standards, as well as to grow the audiences for great cultural events of tomorrow.

I shall say a few words about the importance that we attach to investment in sport in schools. In many of the areas that we inherited as a Government, we inherited degradation and decay. The state of school sport after 18 years of Conservative Government is an example of degradation and decay. We are committed to rebuilding the opportunity to play sport and to compete in sport as part of every child's life.

We are already investing in 2,000 professional and dedicated sports staff to drive up the quality of school sport. We are investing also more than £1 billion in rebuilding the infrastructure that makes playing high-quality sport possible. We are impatient for sport and we are impatient for progress. We shall bring better quality teaching of sport and more after-school activity. That is already being shown in the school sport partnership areas. There are more competitive inter-school fixtures. Again, that is a break with the past, when the Conservative Government devastated the opportunity of state schools to take part in competitive sport. Links are being made between schools and local sports clubs so that children who are talented and gifted in sport face no obstacle to their ambition other than the extent of their talent and ambition.

Mr. Damian Green: The right hon. Lady has talked a lot about school sport. Will she give a commitment to stop selling off school playing fields?

Tessa Jowell: The hon. Gentleman is a spokesperson of the party that sold off about 5,000 school playing fields. We are investing in new playing fields. The only playing fields that will be sold off are those that have no use or are being replaced as a result of the new investment. I hope that we shall hear no more from the Conservative party on this issue. We have their crocodile tears only now for the sale of school playing fields during the 18 years when Conservative Governments were in power.

Sport is important for individuals, and a good sports policy is a health policy. My hon. Friend the Member for Brent, North, who I know gave notice that he had to leave the Chamber before the end of the debate, described the impact of obesity. Sport is also a good education policy and a good anti-crime policy. During the summer, in areas of particularly high street crime where summer splash schemes operated, street crime fell by 22 per cent. In areas that did not have these summer camps with a heavy sports focus, street crime fell by only 5 per cent.

In a changing world, our institutions and regulations must also change to reflect the new ways in which we work and the new services that we consume. They must protect our interests as citizens and as consumers in a way that responds to the world as it is and as it is becoming, and not be frozen in the past. It is in this spirit of modernisation, reform and focus on individuals that we bring forward the Communications Bill and the Alcohol and Entertainment Licensing Bill.

The Communications Bill was considered in draft by a Joint Committee of both Houses during the previous Session. It will be the focus for our determination to create the most dynamic and competitive communications industry in the world. Change is perhaps nowhere faster and greater in scale than in the world of communications. It took thirty years to go from one to four television stations, from three to four radio stations, but now we have over 200 TV channels and over 100 national and local radio stations. The Alcohol and Entertainment Licensing Bill will encourage a more civilised culture in pubs, bars and restaurants and increase choice for consumers. It will be based on clear objectives—preventing crime; reducing disorder and public nuisance; ensuring public safety;

and protecting children from harm. Existing laws have neither encouraged the emergence of a civilised café society nor prevented the growth of drink-related antisocial behaviour. It is time to fulfil our commitment to change the rules.

Both measures confirm our commitment to deregulate wherever possible. Being in favour of deregulation does not mean being in favour of a free-for-all. I shall outline briefly the principles of the regulatory regimes that we are creating in the two Bills. They aim to secure the protection of citizens and consumers, make room for businesses to invest, innovate and compete, and be responsive to the changing demands of consumers. Regulations must be justified, and will be removed if they are not. They must be proportionate, targeted, clear and predictable, providing a sound basis for investment decisions. They must not be burdensome to carry out and are to be as light-touch as possible, but that does not mean light for those who breach the rules, for whom regulatory action should be swift, effective, and as painful as necessary to ensure that public and commercial interests are protected.

The licensing Bill, as the House will be aware, was published this morning. I greatly welcome the broad consensus on the need for reform, which is tackled in a Bill that recognises that our licensing laws are outdated. Problems arising from alcohol consumption include noise, disorder, nuisance and drink-related crime, so the Bill clamps down on the antisocial behaviour perpetrated by the minority. It is a major plank of the Government's drive in the Queen's Speech to tackle antisocial behaviour. It gets rid of six existing licensing regimes, a simplification has been widely welcomed by the industry. Other measures include new police powers to close licensed premises without notice for up to 24 hours where disorder is occurring. Most widely trailed, there will be potential for 24-hour opening seven days a week to help minimise, not increase, the public disorder which results from artificially early closing.

The desire to deregulate also extends to the Communications Bill, which will give powers to a single regulator, Ofcom. It will reform the rules on media ownership but will not let broadcasting standards or quality slip. It will give Ofcom concurrent powers with the Office of Fair Trading to enforce general competition law in the communications sector for the benefit of business and consumers alike. Importantly, it implements European Commission directives on electronic networks and services.

Sport is facing change, and in the few minutes that I have left I should like to reaffirm unequivocally the Government's commitment to maintain funding for its elite sports men and women as they prepare for the 2004 Olympics. Whatever slur the Opposition try to inflict, however they distort the position to create anxiety among our athletes, what they assert is simply not the case.

The Queen's Speech introduces two Bills of a deregulatory nature that are the responsibility of my Department. They build on wide consultation with the industry and represent consensus. Most important of all, they are about the people's pleasure—they are about enriching and improving quality of life for people up and down the country, and I commend them to the House.

Debate adjourned.—*[Dan Norris.]*

Debate to be resumed on Monday 18 November.

Potters Bar Rail Accident

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Dan Norris.]*

2.29 pm

Mr. James Clappison (Hertsmere): It is six months since the Potters Bar derailment, in which, tragically, seven people lost their lives and many others were injured. One of those who lost their lives was a constituent of mine, the much respected Agnes Quinlevan, a former district nurse who gave a lifetime of service to others and was still serving the community on that fateful day. I know that my constituents would want me to pay tribute to her today.

The other victims of that tragic incident came from all over the rest of the country and, indeed, from all over the world. I know, for example, that representatives from Taiwan are present here today. I am conscious of the fact that, tragically, that incident in my constituency affected families in other parts of the world. We have responsibilities to them arising from an event that took place on the railways of this country.

I shall explore two main issues today: first, issues relating to safety, and secondly, how the families of those who lost their lives can be helped. On safety, the House is aware that that stretch of line is extremely busy and is used every day by many thousands of travellers, including many of my constituents who commute from Potters Bar railway station. They are aware, as I am, that it is barely two years since the equally tragic incident at Hatfield, just a few miles to the north on the same line, in which four people lost their lives. Against that background, and against the background of what has emerged since the Potters Bar derailment, we are looking for a high level of reassurance about safety on the line.

In July, the Health and Safety Executive published a progress report on Potters Bar. The report confirmed that the derailment resulted from faults in the points, which caused them to fail catastrophically. The fault lay in nuts missing from adjustable stretcher bars. As a result, the rear coach was derailed. Worryingly, tests of a sample of nuts on the adjustable stretcher bars of other points in the Potters Bar area revealed that 20 per cent. were not fully tight, according to the Health and Safety Executive. The report also disclosed that a sample inspection of points across the rail network as a whole found differing standards in condition and maintenance arrangements, including record keeping.

The Minister is no doubt aware of written parliamentary questions that I have asked, and I refer him in particular to the answer that I received on 7 November. I was told that Railtrack was taking measures to improve safety, including the provision of guidance on good practice for safely setting up and maintaining adjustable stretcher bars. Can the Minister say whether that guidance has yet been issued? I ask him to satisfy himself that the guidance is comprehensive. Most important of all, will he take an active interest in seeing that the good practice is implemented in the Potters Bar area and throughout the rail network?

[Mr. James Clappison]

I also seek an assurance from the Minister today that the deficiencies found in 20 per cent. of the points in the Potters Bar area have been put right. Will the Minister give an assurance that the in-depth design review of railway points that Network Rail promised to complete by next month will be taken forward in a timely way when it is completed?

As for the question of the causes of the derailment, the possibility of sabotage has been aired and received some prominence in the media. I believe that Jarvis Construction has chosen to give some prominence to the idea of sabotage. It is my understanding that at no stage has any evidence emerged to support sabotage as a cause of the derailment. Indeed, in its July report, the Health and Safety Executive noted that

"no technical evidence has yet been established to support speculation that vandalism or deliberate damage caused the derailment but it is keeping an open mind."

Jarvis and any others raising the question of sabotage may wish to put it into that perspective. As the HSE said, that is speculation. There is no supporting evidence.

My second question is how the victims' families and the injured can be helped, and there are two particular matters that I wish to raise. First, I believe that applications have been made by some families for the coroner to hold what are known as mini-inquests of the kind that took place after the Ladbroke Grove tragedy. They would set out the basic circumstances of what took place in respect of each of the victims. I hope that the feelings of the families will be taken into account on the holding of mini-inquests. It is understandable that they should wish to know the facts about the circumstances of this tragic derailment.

More generally, there is the question of how we face up to our responsibilities. After each of the tragic incidents at Southall, Ladbroke Grove and Hatfield there was an early admission of liability by the authority concerned. So far, six months on, there has been no such admission of liability in the case of the Potters' Bar derailment. Survivors and relatives of the deceased will want a thorough investigation, to find out how such a terrible event came to pass. They will also want to see an acceptance of responsibility, as happened in each of the other tragic incidents to which I have referred. It would be good to ensure that the victims are not put through the treadmill of litigation, and that they see that someone is facing up to their responsibilities in respect of this incident.

Against that background, many of the bereaved families and injured have called for a public inquiry. I agree that there is a strong case for a public inquiry that would resolve some important issues both for the families and for the travelling public. In the light of what has emerged since the derailment and the way in which matters are proceeding, the case for that public inquiry becomes stronger all the time.

Will the Minister give active consideration to the case for a public inquiry into the Potters Bar derailment? More widely, I urge all those concerned to consider the issue of responsibility. There is the question of how we deal with the families, and how we learn the lessons from the derailment. We cannot begin to learn the lessons until someone accepts responsibility.

At the outset, I said that people from a wide variety of backgrounds caught the 12.45 for Cambridge and King's Lynn on 10 May—people going about their business, visitors to this country and students. They were all members of the travelling public who put their trust in the safety of the railways. Mr. Ogunwusi was a solicitor on his way to visit a client, and his widow, Sola Ogunwusi, is here today.

Jennifer Cox, a young Australian backpacker, was another passenger. She was thrown out of a window and on to the platform as the rear carriage became detached and careered along the platform before becoming wedged under the station canopy. She sustained serious injuries but fortunately survived. When I met her recently she told me that she had been travelling on the railways in various less-developed parts of the world and from time to time had had qualms about her safety. However, her travels had been uneventful until she arrived in Britain. When she arrived here her qualms disappeared, because she thought our railways were safe. That should give us all pause for thought.

2.39 pm

The Minister for Transport (Mr. John Spellar): I congratulate the hon. Member for Hertsmere (Mr. Clappison) on securing this debate. I join him in extending sympathy to the family and friends of all those who lost their lives or were injured in this tragic rail accident. For all those concerned, the pain will still be very real and very raw. We cannot begin to imagine the nightmare that these people must have suffered and surely must continue to suffer, but we can understand their absolute determination, which the hon. Gentleman expressed, to find answers as to why this tragic accident happened. The priority must therefore be to establish the causes and anything that needs to be done to prevent such a tragedy from happening again.

On the derailment itself, the Health and Safety Executive investigation team has established and made it public that the rear coach of a four-coach commuter train bound for King's Lynn from King's Cross derailed while passing over points No. 2182A just before Potters Bar station. The coach detached from the others and came to rest on its side, wedged under the canopies of the station and bridging adjacent platforms. Debris from the accident fell through gaps in the bridge, sadly killing a passer-by. The other three coaches remained upright, travelled on through the station and were brought to a halt about 400 m north of it. At the time of the accident, the train was travelling just below the speed limit for this class of vehicle, which is 100 mph.

The emergency services, including both the Hertfordshire police and the British Transport police, were rapidly at the scene of the accident. Safety experts from the Health and Safety Executive attended and joined the British Transport police investigation into the cause of the accident, using their specialist railway inspectors and experts from the health and safety laboratory. They were supported by AEA Technology Rail. It is appropriate at this point to record our thanks to the police, the ambulance service and the firefighters, as well as the many local people who helped out on the day.

The Health and Safety Executive investigation is being undertaken jointly with the British Transport police, who are in the lead while criminal charges other

than those under the Health and Safety at Work, etc. Act 1974 are a possibility. The HSE published a report of its early findings on 14 May, four days after the accident. The HSE investigation, which is a statutory investigation under the 1974 Act, is being conducted under the supervision of an independent HSE investigation board set up under a formal direction from the Health and Safety Commission. The board published a second progress report on the HSE investigation on 4 July. That report confirmed that, as the hon. Gentleman rightly pointed out, the derailment resulted from the fact that nuts were missing from the adjustable stretcher bars, causing points No. 2182A to fail catastrophically. The points were also found not to have been fully set in line with the standards expected.

As we all recognise, points are one of the safety-critical components of the rail network. The investigation board helpfully made in its report a number of preliminary recommendations to achieve improvements in the safety of rail travel. Railtrack and its contractors were called upon to review their arrangements for ensuring that railway points are compliant with the standards and specifications expected. In addition, the board recommended that Railtrack should review the design of points with adjustable stretcher bars better to ensure that good engineering standards are achieved and maintained; that the design of the adjustable stretcher bars themselves should be looked at in the short term better to ensure that the component can fulfil its safety functional requirements; and that, in the longer term, consideration should be given to whether a more inherently safe design should be used.

I understand that the investigation board continues to review with top-level people in Network Rail progress towards implementing all its recommendations. The board intends to publish its next progress report in the spring. I would expect that report to say something about the board's view on the progress that has already been achieved.

The board has made it clear that it wants to be open and transparent in its work and will put information into the public domain as quickly as it can, subject to any legal constraints and the need not to impede the ongoing investigation. Clearly, it is important to keep the bereaved families and survivors informed of developments. Both the HSE investigation board and the British Transport police are rightly very sensitive to that need, and I understand that there have been talks with the bereaved families both in groups and individually. That will continue.

It is essential that the direct and root causes of the accident are thoroughly investigated and that the lessons are learned. The Health and Safety Executive's investigation is comprehensive and thorough and examines all the circumstances of the accident to establish the causes of the derailment. That includes considering the factors that contributed to its consequences, such as debris falling through gaps in the Darkes lane bridge.

I appreciate that several bereaved families have requested a public inquiry, and the hon. Member for Hertsmere mentioned that. We must be clear that public inquiries are not convened after every rail accident. They tend to be set up to consider general principles and major structural issues rather than to establish the immediate cause of an accident. The Southall and Ladbroke Grove inquiries produced many recommendations, which the industry is currently implementing. Some of the issues that the Ladbroke Grove inquiry examined may be relevant to the Potters Bar investigation, for example, the management and training of contractors.

The Health and Safety Commission and the Secretary of State need to consider the outcome of the Health and Safety Executive investigation into the cause of the incident before deciding whether the issues raised by Potters Bar would benefit from a public inquiry.

The hon. Gentleman also mentioned liability. Compensation is a further issue for those bereaved or injured in the accident. Pending the outcome of investigations by transport police and the Health and Safety Executive, Railtrack and industry parties involved in the accident agreed that Railtrack should act as the lead party for considering and settling all claims, without victims and relatives having to prove legal liability. That was done to prevent further distress to the families involved, and to unlock the compensation process to enable the bereaved and injured to proceed with claims without having to sort out whether there is industry liability or ascertain where it lies. I understand that Network Rail, which has bought Railtrack, has contacted the relevant families about that.

More generally, safety is at the heart of our policies for revitalising the railway. However, it is also important to remember that rail remains one of the safest forms of surface transport in this country. It is some six times safer than travel by car, and the overall record has gradually been improving. Since the 1970s, the frequency of fatal train accidents has reduced from roughly five a year to approximately one a year. The number of signals passed at danger in 2001–02 was the lowest 12-month total recorded since records began in 1985.

Although the railway's general safety record is good, several rail crashes in recent years, including Potters Bar, have demonstrated that we must not be complacent and that much remains to be done. The industry is now focused on putting right the weaknesses that those recent major accidents revealed.

Work is under way to implement the many recommendations that emerged from the public inquiry reports into the Southall and Ladbroke Grove crashes as well as the joint inquiry on train protection systems. Many recommendations cover a wide range of technical and operational issues, including signal layouts, signal sighting, driver management and training, the crash-worthiness of rolling stock, fire mitigation and passenger escape from trains.

Other recommendations cover the whole safety regime, including contractors, safety leadership in the industry, safety cases, the need to accredit suppliers, licensing for train drivers, and the need for both an independent industry safety body and an independent rail accident investigation branch.

The Health and Safety Executive continues to monitor implementation of all the recommendations. At the end of the month, it will publish a detailed themed report on progress from the Southall, Ladbroke Grove and train protection systems public inquiries.

[Mr. John Spellar]

It was announced in the Queen's Speech this week that the Government will introduce a Bill in this Session that will include proposals to create an independent rail accident investigation branch. The sole objective of the RAIB will be to discover what caused an incident or accident so that lessons may be learned and safety improved throughout the industry. Separating the RAIB from the judicial process will enable it to be tasked solely with discovering the causes of accidents, not with any subsequent prosecution. That should allow the facts to be established and published more quickly than under the current system.

The RAIB will also ensure that those affected by an accident, including any victims and the bereaved, will be kept in touch with the progress of its investigation. It will be required to publish a report on the conclusion of its investigations as well as interim reports while its investigations are still ongoing if there are urgent safety lessons to be learned. Although that cannot apply to the Potters Bar accident, it should make a difference to future investigations.

A key component of the strategy to improve rail safety is the implementation of the train protection and warning system, which is being rolled out across the rail network. Installation will be complete by the end of 2003. As at the end of July 2002, 79 per cent. of the passenger fleet and 67 per cent. of the Railtrack fitment programme were complete. The industry estimates that TPWS will reduce the risk from SPADs by between 65 and 80 per cent. On the European rail traffic management system, the HSC is seeking the views of passengers, railway staff and the wider public before putting advice to Ministers in early 2003 on the best way forward. The ERTMS will further improve train protection.

The Potters Bar derailment has once again raised concerns about track maintenance and the use of contractors in that process. Indeed, the same issue has been a key component of the investigation of the October 2000 Hatfield accident. Earlier this year, a HSC report on the use of contractors concluded that contractorisation itself is not the problem, but there is a need for better management control and a well-trained work force. The Cullen recommendations now being implemented should deliver that.

In addition, I am sure that we all agree that Railtrack's recent announcement of a new approach to improve its management and oversight of its maintenance contractors is a welcome step. Under the new arrangements, which will be introduced to the eastern region early in 2003 and throughout the rest of the country by April 2004, Network Rail will decide what gets done and when, with contractors responsible for the quality of the work.

All that must be underpinned by a cultural change in the railway industry, and we know that John Armitt, the chief executive, and his team at Network Rail, as well as the companies throughout, are determined to achieve it. Such change is vital to developing the railway system that we are determined to deliver—a revitalised industry with safety at its heart that is built on seeking cost-effective ways to improve. We want the industry to look forward rather than to the past, and to look outward rather than inward. That is fundamental to building a live and vibrant safety culture throughout the railway industry, and it is the foundation stone of preventing such accidents as Potters Bar.

The Government are committed to ensuring that we have a safer railway, for no other reason than that we owe it to all those affected by the Potters Bar derailment to make that happen.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at seven minutes to Three o'clock.

House of Commons

Monday 18 November 2002

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

SPEAKER'S STATEMENT

Mr. Speaker: Before I call the first question, I have a short statement to make on some aspects of Question Time. In the first Session of this Parliament, progress at Question Time was disappointingly slow. In its recent report, the Procedure Committee expressed the view that the Chair should foster more incisive, tightly focused exchanges. I intend to do exactly that. I expect questions to be sharp and to the point: no long preambles; one Member, one question; and Ministerial answers no longer than a single printed paragraph of modest length in *Hansard*. Ministers in charge of Departments and leading Opposition Front-Bench spokesmen have been some of the worst offenders. I ask them in particular to set a good example to their colleagues. I intend to enforce those ground rules. In doing that, I may have to interrupt Members in all parts of the House when they are in full flow. I regret that, but in the wider interests of the House I feel it my duty to take action.

Secondly, I remind hon. Members of the Procedure Committee's suggestion that in certain circumstances, I might invite a Member to ask a second supplementary question. I shall bear that in mind.

Finally, I should like the House to be aware that, where I call for a supplementary a Member who has a later question to the same Minister on the Order Paper, it will be automatically unstarred.

Oral Answers to Questions

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

The Secretary of State was asked—

Licensed Entertainment

1. **Siobhain McDonagh** (Mitcham and Morden): What studies her Department has made of the noise implications of the reform of licensed entertainment for residents living near licensed premises. [81368]

The Minister for Tourism, Film and Broadcasting (Dr. Kim Howells): We have made several such studies.

Siobhain McDonagh: Whatever the reply was, Mr. Speaker, does the Minister agree that, although it is important to introduce sound insulation so that residents who live close to pubs can lead good lives, it is important that the new licensing legislation increases the amount of live music in Britain?

Dr. Howells: We believe that our proposed legislation will create many venues for live music in this country. For the first time, there will be a proper review of licences that are sought and granted. It will include the views of residents who sometimes have to put up with loud music.

Nick Harvey (North Devon): Although I welcome the Government's moves to sweep away arcane licensing laws, I urge them to make their new measures deregulatory, and not replace those that they are removing with a load of new bureaucratic regulations.

On noise, would not it be better for police and environmental health officers to be told when licensed premises opened rather than acquiring all the information through the licence?

Dr. Howells: We believe that our proposed legislation is deregulatory and will do away with much red tape and bureaucracy, allowing for a premises licence that will enable the licensee not only to sell alcohol but to provide entertainment. That is a major plus for the music industry and I support it wholeheartedly.

European Capital of Culture Bid (Newcastle/ Gateshead)

2. **Joyce Quin** (Gateshead, East and Washington, West): What discussions she has held on Newcastle-Gateshead's bid to be the European capital of culture. [81369]

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Tessa Jowell): None specifically.

Joyce Quin: My right hon. Friend will appreciate that I enthusiastically welcome Newcastle-Gateshead's inclusion in the short list for European city of culture. *[Interruption.]* I am sure that other hon. Members welcome the inclusion of their cities, too.

The link between culture and economic regeneration is important. Does my right hon. Friend agree that awarding capital of culture status is not simply a matter of high-profile cultural projects, but a matter of considering what it means in reaching out to local communities, promoting employment and enhancing the quality of life?

Tessa Jowell: The short list that I announced on 30 October was recommended by the panel according to the clear criteria for capital of culture status that were established by the European Union and developed by the Department. Regeneration is not a specific criterion, but I accept my right hon. Friend's point that arts and culture can be powerful drivers of successful regeneration, as her cities of Newcastle and Gateshead clearly show.

Miss Julie Kirkbride (Bromsgrove): I hope that the Secretary of State is also aware of the bids made by other

cities across the United Kingdom to become the European capital of culture, and that she will therefore see Birmingham as by far the superior bid, not least because of the cultural opportunities that that city now offers. Does the right hon. Lady not regard that as a more important benefit than the economic regeneration referred to by the right hon. Member for Gateshead, East and Washington, West (Joyce Quin)?

Tessa Jowell: The panel has recommended the bids received by Bristol, Birmingham, Oxford, Liverpool, Cardiff and Newcastle/Gateshead, on the basis of their excellence. The remaining shortlisted bidders—Brighton, Bradford, Belfast, Canterbury, Inverness and Norwich—were also very strong contenders. This competition has unlocked the cultural potential in many of our cities. There will only be one winner, but we hope that the efforts made by every city will be developed and capitalised on, and that the visions described in their bids will be translated into practice.

Seaside Resorts

3. **Mrs. Joan Humble** (Blackpool, North and Fleetwood): What plans she has to revive the tourist industry in British seaside resorts. [81370]

9. **Mr. Anthony D. Wright** (Great Yarmouth): How many holidaymakers visited British seaside resorts in the summer of 2002. [81376]

10. **Lawrie Quinn** (Scarborough and Whitby): What is her Department doing to encourage domestic and international visitors to visit English seaside resorts throughout the year. [81377]

The Minister for Tourism, Film and Broadcasting (Dr. Kim Howells): The reforms of the support given by the Government to tourism, with a new focus on domestic marketing, e-tourism, and greater involvement of regional development agencies and the private sector, will help to revive seaside resorts.

Mrs. Humble: I thank the Minister for visiting Blackpool as part of his recent tour of seaside towns. Will he take this opportunity to re-emphasise the importance of tourism as a key economic driver in regeneration, and of the role of the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, working with other Departments, in regeneration projects, and especially in delivering the success of key local initiatives such as the bold vision outlined in Blackpool's master plan?

Dr. Howells: I know that my hon. Friend is a great supporter of the master plan, and so am I; it is a very imaginative project. The key to the plan will be to ensure that the regional development agencies, as well as the regional tourist boards, understand the importance of seaside resorts not only as places where people take their holidays but as the great drivers of economic success and of jobs within each of the regions. I shall expect those organisations to work closely with all local authorities in seaside resorts to ensure that they become even greater successes than they are now.

Mr. Anthony D. Wright: Does my hon. Friend agree that, to increase the visitor numbers to seaside resorts, we need to modernise? To that end, the Government have recently given most seaside resorts objective 2 status, which has opened up new avenues for them. Does my hon. Friend agree that we need to get that finance to the seaside resorts with all speed, so that they can initiate the modernisation that they require to increase visitor numbers to the United Kingdom?

Dr. Howells: It is useful that so many seaside resorts are included in objective 2 support areas. I hope that imagination will be used in deciding where that money is to be spent. We need new attractions, and many seaside resorts need to reinvent themselves, in many ways, as major attractions of the future. Indeed, if they do not succeed in doing so, we shall have great difficulty in persuading people from abroad to visit anything other than our most established attractions. We really need seaside resorts to replenish that pool of attractions.

Lawrie Quinn: My hon. Friend will remember my constituency's unique selling points from his visit in the summer—Captain Cook in Whitby and Alan Ayckbourn in Scarborough. Should we not be focusing on the branding of seaside resorts, in terms of both international and domestic visitors?

Dr. Howells: It is true that the visitors who come here from abroad tend to spend a lot more than visitors from inside Britain, generally because they stay longer at their destinations. The figures are sometimes quite startling. When the Endeavour came to Whitby, it had such an effect on the number of visitors to the town that it has actually driven house prices up in the area, because so many people want to go and live there. If that is not the best example imaginable of a link between a successful tourism project and the general well-being and health of a town, I do not know what is.

Peter Bottomley (Worthing, West): My grandmother came from Whitby, but I want to talk about Worthing. Will the Minister be kind enough to meet the Worthing hospitality association, and other such associations, to enable him to understand that this is a question not just of the money that the Government spend, but of the money that they might withdraw from the rate support grant? It is not only tourists and visitors, but residents as well, who help to maintain the quality of the town.

Dr. Howells: I should be pleased if the association wrote to me. I would try to fit it in.

As the hon. Gentleman implies, tourism is very much a cross-departmental issue. Important decisions have to be made in other Departments. I think those representing seaside resorts understand that, and the Government certainly understand it; putting the two together is the key.

Mr. Adrian Sanders (Torbay): As the Minister surely recognises, one of the problems affecting most seaside resorts is their crumbling infrastructure. Local authority grants cannot repair it, because they are focused on statutory duties. What discussions has the Minister had

with the Minister for Local Government and the Regions to ensure that such grants reflect the cost of improving infrastructure and wet-weather facilities?

Dr. Howells: I have discussed the matter with other Departments on numerous occasions. I want tourism to be a mainstream economic activity, and to be recognised as such by local authorities and regional development agencies, as it is by Government. If we are to create new jobs and reinvent the attractions of which I spoke earlier, we must understand the importance of infrastructure. If towns look shabby they will not keep their visitors: even their traditional visitors will eventually shy away. Tourists can spend their money anywhere in the world, and do so regularly, so it is important for our seaside resorts to look their very best.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Mid-Sussex): Does the Minister agree that many seaside resorts are among the most golden assets in the portfolio of tourism that we have to offer? Does he also agree that in many cases standards are so dismal, and there is so far to go, that resorts need more advice on how to make the most of themselves? Given the confused state of tourism marketing, might it be possible to establish an overarching benchmarking standard to help those resorts raise themselves to the standard of the best?

Dr. Howells: I am pleased to tell the hon. Gentleman, who I know is passionate about these issues, that the confusion is over. A single agency will now be responsible for the marketing of England, and indeed for the marketing of Britain generally in the world. It is important that we drive standards up; if we do not we will lose the tourists, including the most important tranche. I am thinking especially of the Americans. We must get them back, and we must keep them.

David Cairns (Greenock and Inverclyde): Will my hon. Friend join me in intervening with Network Rail to help resurrect the long-overdue redevelopment of the lovely seaside resort of Gourock in my constituency—a project that was scuppered by shortsighted, bureaucratic, idiotic decisions made by the thankfully now defunct Railtrack?

Dr. Howells: My hon. Friend is clearly a major attraction in his constituency. We could do worse than market him.

Mr. John Whittingdale (Maldon and East Chelmsford): Does the Minister accept that the tourism industry is the biggest contributor to the economy for which his Department is responsible, and that it should therefore have the strongest voice? So far there has been virtually no comment, in Parliament or in the press, about the abolition of the English Tourism Council, which was announced just over two weeks ago. Is it not the case that while seaside resorts in Scotland and Wales will continue to benefit from the promotion activities of the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly, as well as the British Tourist Authority, English tourist resorts will in future have no national voice to promote their interests?

Dr. Howells: That is not true. As I explained to the hon. Member for Mid-Sussex, (Mr. Soames), there will be a single body in future. I believe that it will do a much better job than the two separate bodies, because it will be structured and funded differently and will have different targets. The English Tourism Council worked hard at fulfilling its remit and in many respects it did an excellent job, as indeed did the British Tourist Authority, but we have picked up signals from the industry as a whole. It clearly wants one body with which to connect and work on all facets of tourism, and that is what we are providing.

Mr. Whittingdale: The Minister says that the new body will be given responsibility for marketing English tourism, but does he accept that it was a mistake for his Government to remove the marketing function from the English Tourism Council in the first place? Can he guarantee that the new body will be given sufficient resources to market England properly and that that will not be left to the regional tourism bodies in what many suspect is a further move towards this Government's regional agenda?

Dr. Howells: I am not about to attack the Government's regional agenda, but, yes, I believe that it was a mistake to take away the ETC's marketing role. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman knows that the industry has had an unprecedented sum in the £20 million that we allocated to the BTA for the 1 million visitor campaign to try to help the industry to recover after the terrible events of 11 September and foot and mouth in this country. I am confident that it is bringing good rewards now.

Jim Knight (South Dorset): I am grateful to the Minister for including Weymouth in his trip to English seaside towns earlier this year, but the single issue that tourism businesses in my constituency are raising with me is the proposal to reorganise the school year into six terms. What discussions has he had with the Department for Education and Skills on the proposal, which some tourism businesses in my constituency liken to removing from retailers the last shopping week before Christmas?

Dr. Howells: I enjoyed my visit to Weymouth, and my visits to Portland and Swanage, very much. You can tell what I have been doing with my time, Mr. Speaker.

I am confident that our discussions with the Department for Education and Skills will result in a good outcome to all that, although I say to tourism businesses that change is always difficult to accommodate and come to terms with, as well as a bit of a daunting prospect. However, I am sure that no one in the private sector, and certainly no one in the Government, wants the revival of tourism after a bad year in 2001 to be detracted from in any way by some new regime that makes people's lives much more difficult.

Elite Sport Funding

4. **Mr. Nick Hawkins** (Surrey Heath): What plans she has for funding of elite sportsmen and sportswomen over the next 10 years. [81371]

The Minister for Sport (Mr. Richard Caborn): Funding to our elite sportsmen and sportswomen is

provided through the national lottery. The Government are committed to maintaining lottery funding to elite athletes at the same level in the run-up to the Athens Olympics as was provided in the run-up to the Sydney Olympics.

Mr. Hawkins: Despite what the Minister claims, I am told by leading sports administrators who speak to me and to my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) that they are being briefed by the Minister's officials that, despite the successes of our sportsmen and sportswomen at the Sydney Olympics and the Manchester Commonwealth games, their funding will be cut, and removed altogether in some successful sports, because lottery ticket sales are falling. That is what we are hearing from people at the sharp end whom the Minister's officials are briefing. The Prime Minister loves basking in the reflected glory with receptions for sportsmen and sportswomen at No. 10, but is not the funding being removed?

Mr. Caborn: What the hon. Gentleman says is totally and utterly untrue. We give a clear commitment this afternoon that the funding was there as we went into the Sydney Olympics and that it will be there in the run-up to Athens. That is the position. The Government have given that commitment up to Athens to all our Olympic sports that received it up to Sydney. I can be no clearer than that.

Dr. Jack Cunningham (Copeland): Does my right hon. Friend's answer mean that the Government will guarantee to implement all the financial recommendations of the elite sport funding review group, which reported last year and which the Prime Minister described as an excellent piece of work? Does it mean that, in addition to maintaining pre-Sydney funding for Olympic athletes up to Athens, implementation of the report's other financial recommendations will also be guaranteed?

Mr. Caborn: The answer is yes. The vast majority of the 40 recommendations given in my right hon. Friend's report—the Cunningham report—have been implemented. Beyond the 40 commitments that were asked for, we are investing £120 million in the English Institute of Sport, which I hope will be on stream in the next 18 months. That will probably give the best infrastructure for elite athletes anywhere in the world.

I have just come back from Australia. The Australian Institute of Sport is being revised and responsibilities are being devolved to the states. It involves higher education much more effectively. It is rightly revisiting its arrangements. What this country puts in place for our elite athletes in the next 18 months to two years will be unrivalled throughout the world.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): What are the nature, extent and results so far of funding for junior tennis players who have talent but no money?

Mr. Caborn: The Lawn Tennis Association is investing about £17 million per year in grassroots tennis. We welcome that. We have been working with the association for many years, and we shall continue to do so through the English Institute of Sport and our other facilities. I hope that more elite tennis players will come through than we have now.

Mr. Speaker: I call Dr. Iddon.

Dr. Brian Iddon (Bolton, South-East): Question 5, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale) *rose—*

Mr. Speaker: Dr. Iddon, I am sorry. I call Mr. Greenway on Question 4.

Mr. Greenway: I am grateful, Mr. Speaker, because we would like an important issue to be cleared up. After Sydney, the Prime Minister promised that funding for our elite athletes would be increased. Despite what the Minister has just said, the only announcement that we have had was in a written answer that he gave me less than two weeks ago, which showed a 15 per cent. cut in funding from the lottery fund. As my hon. Friend the Member for Surrey Heath (Mr. Hawkins) suggested, that is why sports governing bodies are being briefed to expect a cut. I assure the Minister that we want this Conservative initiative to thrive, but we need some clear answers. If the money is not coming from the lottery, where is it coming from; and when will a proper announcement be made?

Mr. Caborn: I think Conservative Members are confused. Everyone knows that there has been a reduction in lottery income for all good causes. That is not the question that was asked. The question asked was whether there will be a reduction in the investment in our elite athletes in the run-up to Athens, and the answer is no: there will be no reduction in the investment in our elite athletes or in the commitment that the Prime Minister gave that we will continue to fund at the same level as we funded up to Sydney. We will do that up to Athens, and we will continue to do that. The money will be found from inside and outside the lottery.

Cricket

5. **Dr. Brian Iddon** (Bolton, South-East): What assistance she gives to create new facilities for the game of cricket. [81372]

The Minister for Sport (Mr. Richard Caborn) *rose—*

Dr. Iddon: My second innings.

Mr. Caborn: Very good. The Opposition were obviously slow at getting to the wicket.

The Government support the provision of new cricket facilities through various means, including funding from the sports lottery fund administered by Sport England. The lottery sports fund has awarded almost 600 grants totalling £74.8 million towards the creation of new cricket facilities.

Dr. Iddon: Fortunately, cricket is still very popular in my constituency, but some of the older grounds need investment, especially in pavilions. My ethnic minority

constituents are finding it increasingly difficult to play the game owing to a shortage of grounds. Will my right hon. Friend bear that in mind when he is facilitating and helping the game of cricket?

Mr. Caborn: Very much so. If my hon. Friend wants to write to me about any specific case, I will take it up. I congratulate the England and Wales Cricket Board on its recent initiative. It is now one of the best governing bodies in sport, and has involved the grassroots through every secondary and primary school and through the facilities in its academy. The link with Channel 4 through "Howzat?" is good to look at and is used by schools. Other governing bodies should look into ways of involving grassroots sport. There are probably more young people playing cricket now than there have been for many generations.

Mr. Tony Baldry (Banbury): Will the Minister find time to visit Banbury cricket club so that he can have a better understanding of the difficulties that it is experiencing with the Charity Commissioners? Is it not time that charity law was overhauled? It seems strange that recreation is a charitable pursuit, but not sport. For many cricket clubs such as the Banbury cricket club that is a complete headache.

Mr. Caborn: I could not agree more, which is why the performance and innovation unit report on charities a few weeks ago stated that amateur sport ought to have charitable status as of right. We would welcome that, and it is unfortunate that it has taken something like 150 years to revisit the subject of charities. The hon. Gentleman is right that the subject should have been revisited earlier, probably by the previous Administration. However, I agree that the matter needs to be simplified and we have done what we can within the current rules. I hope that more clubs will apply for and get charitable status, but the Charity Commission is looking at that sympathetically under the new leadership of John Stoker. I hope that we can make progress.

Mr. Stephen Hepburn (Jarrow): Is the Minister aware that there is not one school cricket side in South Tyneside? Surely if we are to try to encourage greater participation in cricket, we need to get to the schools and make sure that youngsters get involved at an early age. Will he look into the unique case of South Tyneside—and at other boroughs with a similarly low wealth base—to make sure that cricket is available to everybody, not just the better schools?

Mr. Caborn: I will look at that matter. The ECB wants to get round to every single primary and secondary school with senior players and to provide facilities. Anyone visiting Lord's will see that the facilities that are being developed, including a new CD-ROM, are excellent. The facilities are there to get cricket into schools and the investment is going in, as the ECB has a strategy for the development of indoor and outdoor cricket facilities. Quick cricket is also taking off in many schools. I am surprised by what my hon. Friend says, but if he wants to write to me I will take the matter up with the ECB and see if we can do something about it.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): In my village, we are aware of the support given by the ECB and by Somerset county cricket club, which has been excellent. However, the key to good cricket is good cricket pitches. What is the Minister doing to encourage the training and employment of good groundsmen in the public sector?

Hon. Members: Good question.

Mr. Caborn: That is a very good question, as my hon. Friends have said. I cannot answer it at the moment, but I will ask the ECB. The quality of our pitches is not what might be expected, but the development of artificial surfaces ought to be looked at. Such pitches do not need the same maintenance and are more cost-effective. They are a little more expensive on the capital side but are much more effective on the revenue side and, with floodlighting, can be used 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, with very little wear. There is a revolution in terms of sports facilities and cricket is looking at that. However, I will take the point up with the ECB.

Film Industry

7. **James Purnell** (Stalybridge and Hyde): If she will make a statement on the Film Council's plans to build a sustainable and growing UK film industry. [81374]

The Minister for Tourism, Film and Broadcasting (Dr. Kim Howells): On 5 November, Sir Alan Parker, chair of the Film Council, set out his vision for the future of the UK film industry, and called for a debate about where the industry goes from here. I very much welcome this. I agree with Sir Alan that the key areas to be addressed are education and skills, the distribution of films—as well as their production—and the role of the UK industry on the international stage through sales or in the making of films.

James Purnell: Does my hon. Friend support the Film Council's suggestion of a tax incentive for the distribution of films? Will he make sure that, in any proposals, the role and funding of cultural films and of young film makers will be enhanced?

Dr. Howells: One of the Film Council's chief objectives is to support cultural films. It is for the Film Council itself to work out the detail of how best to deliver that objective. I agree with the council in the work that it is undertaking as part of its specialised exhibition and distribution strategy to channel a considerable amount of money into a cinema fund to increase access and broaden audiences for specialised films, and for cultural films especially. There is no point in funding those films—whether they are cultural or any other kind—unless somebody goes along to see them, so the films have to be made available.

On tax, the last estimate is that tax relief has provided more than £100 million of direct benefit to film production in this country over the last three years. I am glad that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor has extended this relief to 2005.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): Will the hon. Gentleman join me in congratulating films such as "Gosford Park" and "Bend it like Beckham", which are a great tribute to the UK film industry? Will he see fit to do all he possibly can for private cinema exhibitors, who are under increasing pressure in trying to compete with the big exhibitors?

Dr. Howells: That is a real problem. As the hon. Lady knows, I am a great believer in the market. The growth of multiplex cinemas is a boon but we must look after the film makers whom my hon. Friend the Member for Stalybridge and Hyde (James Purnell) mentioned earlier. I am glad that UGC, one of the big owners of multiplexes, has decided to set aside a screen for the showing of films that are not blockbusters or mainstream, which is important.

We must also look after those cinemas that are still in our high streets or rural areas. Through its digital fund, the Film Council is looking at how it can help regional cinemas, for example, to take advantage of technological advances. That must be a good thing for the distribution of non-mainstream films and for their exhibition throughout the country.

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): I know that my hon. Friend is probably exhausted from travelling around the seaside resorts in the UK, but when he has more energy will he talk to his opposite number in the Department for Education and Skills, because often at the heart of the problem of the British film industry is a mismatch of skills and the industry's production needs? Will he urgently take that part of the report and talk to the Department? We produce many skilled people but there are big deficiencies. When he sits down and has a bit of time, let us get something going.

Dr. Howells: Sir Alan Parker and John Woodward, chief executive of the Film Council, are keen that we work with the Department for Education and Skills to ensure that the skills are there. I am especially interested in script development; a good script is at the heart of every good film. All too often, we do not learn lessons from the Americans, which have been there for a long time, on team writing and on working at scripts in such a way that not just the originator of the script but the person who does the seventh rewrite and turns it into a great film is given the status. Until we learn the importance of those skills, of being able to pay for them and of using them in the most effective way possible, we will always struggle when it comes to international competition in films.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): Of course many of the Los Angeles script writers were born in Britain. I am pleased that the Minister acknowledges that distribution is important. May I urge him not to go down the route adopted by France, where there is a quota system and so many screens every week are reserved for French films? That would be completely wrong.

Dr. Howells: I have no intention of arguing for a quota system.

Sport Education

8. **Mr. Charles Hendry** (Wealden): How many children aged five to 16 receive at least two hours sport and PE each week during the school day. [81375]

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Tessa Jowell): Through the first stage of our school sport partnerships, we estimate that about 25 per cent. of five to 16-year-olds are taking part in PE and sport for at least two hours a week. It is our intention that that figure should increase to 75 per cent. by 2006.

Mr. Hendry: I am grateful for that answer. I think that the Secretary of State will understand why many of us are disappointed that that figure is so low. Many of us believe that all children who are able to should be taking part in a reasonable amount of sport in school every week. Is she aware that the Government spend 800 times as much on health as they do on sport? They spend £1,135 per head on health, thereby essentially countering ill health, but only £1.38 per head on sport, or promoting good health. Should not that shocking disparity be reduced? Would not more sport in schools be a good place to start?

Tessa Jowell: As the hon. Gentleman says, a school sport policy is also good for children's health. Few things that my Department is engaged in are more important than reintroducing sport as part of every child's life. It is an area where perhaps one of the greatest educational inequalities has opened up—particularly in the years when his party was in power. We are committed to ensuring that every child, within the time scales that I have indicated, spends at least two hours a week playing high-quality sport or physical education. That has been matched not just by nearly £0.5 billion to fund the programme but by investment of over £1 billion in facilities throughout the country—new playing fields, new running tracks, new pavilions—and investment in coaches. We cannot simply will that more children should play more sport; we have to address the complexity and the detail of putting every bit of the policy in place. That is what we are going to do for all the children in our country.

Mr. Gareth Thomas (Harrow, West): Does my right hon. Friend share my view that the increased enthusiasm of children aged five to 16 for participating in sport would be one small part of the legacy of a successful Olympic games bid—perhaps by London?

Tessa Jowell: I have promised the House a debate on the question of Government support for a London bid for the 2012 Olympics, which will provide a very good opportunity to air those issues. However, as I made clear in the debate on Friday, the Government will assess a

bid against the following criteria: its deliverability, winnability and affordability, and—in keeping with my hon. Friend's point—its legacy.

Mr. Andrew Mackay (Bracknell): Does the Secretary of State not see that many of us will consider her response to my hon. Friend the Member for Wealden (Mr. Hendry) as both unambitious and very complacent? May I point out to her that it is essential that competitive sport—I stress "competitive" sport—be made available in all schools for all children in this age group as soon as possible?

Tessa Jowell: We try to conduct a lot of debates in this area in a spirit of reasonable cross-party agreement, where such agreement is possible, but a contribution such as the right hon. Gentleman's does him no justice whatsoever. It was his Government who presided over the sale of more than 5,000 playing fields, and who effectively removed competitive sport from the curriculum of children in state schools. That is what we intend to change for the benefit of all the children in our country.

Tony Cunningham (Workington): It is of course vital that our young people take part in such activities in school, but given the apparently huge drop-out rate post 16, does my right hon. Friend not agree that much tighter links between schools and clubs are needed?

Tessa Jowell: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, and that is why we have announced money to invest in school-club links to deal with, among other things, the point raised by the hon. Gentleman who represents the liberal tendency in his party—

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): Buckingham.

Tessa Jowell: Indeed. The hon. Member for Buckingham made a very fair point about the lottery—the random chance—that so many talented children face in terms of realising their talent. One way in which we address that is, as my hon. Friend the Member for Workington (Tony Cunningham) says, by improving and strengthening school-club links.

Chess and Bridge

11. **Dr. Evan Harris** (Oxford, West and Abingdon): If she will extend the definition of sport to include mind sports, with specific reference to chess and bridge. [81378]

The Minister for Sport (Mr. Richard Caborn): Officials from my Department are currently considering the potential for amendments to the Physical Training and Recreation Act 1937 to include mind games, and the possible implications.

Dr. Evan Harris: I thank the Minister for that answer, and for his support for chess and bridge. We have achieved great success in both bridge—notably women's bridge—and chess, coming fifth in the chess Olympiad. Does he recognise that his answer takes us back to the commitment to move matters along—given in March 1999 by his predecessor but one—so that, for example, disabled players of these games can access lottery funds to enable them to participate to the same degree as able-bodied players? Will he arrange a meeting between his officials and representatives of the British Chess Federation and of the English Bridge Union, to progress matters further?

Mr. Caborn: I am more than willing to meet the individuals and organisations that the hon. Gentleman refers to, but I should make the very important point that sport is now a devolved matter: devolved Administrations would have to take action to amend the 1937 Act, and we are far from having reached that position at the moment. The hon. Gentleman would do far better to lobby those devolved Administrations to get unanimity, so that we can consider amending the 1937 Act.

Mr. Andy Reed (Loughborough): With the pressure on Sport England funding for genuine sports, will the Minister assure me that no funding will be diverted to chess?

Mr. Caborn: That will have to be considered if and when the 1937 Act is amended to include chess and bridge. It is not only lottery funding that is important: we also have to consider VAT and the other tax advantages of being designated a sport.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

The hon. Member for Middlesbrough was asked—

Church Repairs (VAT)

30. **Miss Anne McIntosh** (Vale of York): To ask the hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners, what recent representations the Commissioners have received concerning VAT on repairs to church buildings; and if he will make a statement. [81524]

33. **Huw Irranca-Davies** (Ogmore): To ask the hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners, if he will make a statement on discussions with European partners on obtaining a reduced rate of value added tax on repairs and maintenance of church buildings. [81527]

Second Church Estates Commissioner (Mr. Stuart Bell): The Commissioners have not received any formal representations on this matter recently. However, a number of right hon. and hon. Members who have a strong interest in this matter visited the Church Commissioners recently, and I shall be leading a strong delegation to the European Parliament for meetings on 4 December.

Miss McIntosh: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that reply and declare that I am one of the humble Members of Parliament to have been given hospitality by the Church Commissioners. What has been the take-up of

the grants in lieu of VAT reduction on church repairs? Is not this a hugely bureaucratic exercise, costing the Church a vast sum to put the applications together?

Mr. Bell: The hon. Lady's continued interest in this matter is greatly appreciated, not only in the House but by the Church as a whole.

The number of claims received and being processed by the end of the third quarter of 2002 was more than 1,500, and the total payments to churches from the scheme, as at the end of August, was nearly £3.8 million. More applications are now coming in. The question of bureaucracy is currently under consideration with the Department for Culture, Media and Sport and we are hopeful that it might be relieved somewhat, making it easier for the applications not only to be submitted but to be successful.

Huw Irranca-Davies: Does my hon. Friend agree that the interim measures for listed places of worship have been very welcome, although I agree with the hon. Member for Vale of York (Miss McIntosh) that there is concern about what is an alteration and what is a repair, and what are fixtures and what are fittings? There is also a problem with the original invoices, which are often needed for other grant applications. Will he extend his consideration beyond listed buildings, which would be especially valuable in Wales for—

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Bell: I am grateful for your assistance, Mr. Speaker. As we say in courts of law, that was not one question but two.

The Church Commissioners are always glad to see my hon. Friend, and we welcome his taking an interest in this subject. As he is aware, the question of invoices and of how we can speed up the process is very much in the mind of the Church. He will be happy to know that more application forms are now sent out and that the company administering the scheme on behalf of the Government is considering the matter. We hope that any problems with invoices will be solved and that they will all be successfully paid.

ELECTORAL COMMISSION COMMITTEE

The right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed was asked—

Voter Participation

31. **Fiona Mactaggart** (Slough): To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission, what proposals the Committee is considering to increase participation in electoral politics of under-represented sections of the community. [81525]

Mr. A. J. Beith (representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission): Consideration of such proposals would fall outside the statutory remit of your Committee, Mr. Speaker. The Committee has, however, endorsed the Electoral Commission's current corporate plan, which includes plans for promoting public awareness of elections, with a particular focus on groups that currently have relatively low levels of participation in elections.

Fiona Mactaggart: I hope to persuade the right hon. Gentleman to encourage the Electoral Commission to use its powers under section 13 of the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 to ensure that, in the education on electoral systems and democratic processes that it is able to fund, it targets groups such as women and ethnic minorities within all political parties, to ensure that they understand the electoral system and have better strategies to participate in it.

Mr. Beith: We are all aware of the under-representation of women as Members of this House and as candidates, but that is primarily a responsibility with which the political parties will have to deal. There is little evidence that women vote in smaller numbers than men; therefore the commission's work in that field has not included direct attempts to encourage women to go to the polls, since they regularly do so. However, the commission has approached the Equal Opportunities Commission to discuss areas of common interest and possible research projects. In addition, the new initiatives fund administered by the commission provides an opportunity for organisations to submit proposals for pilot projects, which might well meet some of the hon. Lady's goals.

Mr. Derek Wyatt (Sittingbourne and Sheppey): May I ask the right hon. Gentleman for some guidance? Councillor Stephen Worrall of Sheerness has raised a question to which I do not know the answer. His is one of the poorest parts of Britain, yet the local council, Swale borough council, is to reduce the number of polling booths, and he wants to know what legislation can be used to challenge that reduction. Not only is his area poor, but it is one of the areas of lowest turnout in the country.

Mr. Beith: I shall certainly ask the Electoral Commission to write to the hon. Gentleman with any useful advice it can give, but some of the responsibility may lie elsewhere.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield): While it is, of course, important to ensure that pilot projects continue to ensure accessibility for people, so that they can participate in elections and cast their vote, does the right hon. Gentleman agree that until greater relevance is perceived in this place, rather than abuse by Whitehall and by Ministers, people will be disinclined to vote in general and other elections?

Mr. Beith: The Electoral Commission has engaged in quite a bit of research into reasons for not voting, but we all have our personal opinion, and in that respect mine and his are not far apart.

Mr. Chris Bryant (Rhondda): May I urge the right hon. Gentleman to give particular consideration to the needs of former mining constituencies, which do not fall into either the rural or the urban category? There is a

specific problem with providing polling stations in next May's elections—indeed, in my constituency, one third of polling stations are likely to close.

Mr. Beith: Mine is both a mining and, in some parts, a former mining constituency, so I am aware of the problem. The matter is one that will have to be drawn to the attention of other authorities, including those in Wales, but I shall ask the Electoral Commission to keep a close watch on it.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

The hon. Member for Middlesbrough was asked—

Clergy (Employment Rights)

32. **Mr. John Bercow** (Buckingham): To ask the hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners, what representations he has received about the employment rights of the clergy. [81526]

34. **Mr. Huw Edwards** (Monmouth): To ask the hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners, what recent discussions the Church Commissioners have had on employment rights for clergy. [81523]

36. **Mr. Ben Chapman** (Wirral, South): To ask the hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners, when an announcement is expected on the review of employment rights for clergy. [81530]

Second Church Estates Commissioner (Mr. Stuart Bell): Hon. Members may recall from an answer I gave some months ago that the Church of England is considering the Department of Trade and Industry discussion document on employment status in relation to statutory employment rights. The Church will make a formal response by 11 December.

Mr. Bercow: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his typically helpful reply. Does he agree with me that the idea that the spiritual nature of the work undertaken by the clergy should continue to prevent them being granted contracts of service is now thoroughly anachronistic, and that a compelling case has been made for the use of the power in section 23 of the Employment Relations Act 1999 to extend proper employment rights to members of the clergy, who are frequently under-rewarded, but who should be equitably treated?

Mr. Bell: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his question; it is a pleasure to have him back at Church Commissioners Question Time. In the interests of Parliament, I hope that it is a brief sojourn and that he will not be with us for too long. *[Laughter.]* The Second Church Estates Commissioner can be dispassionate about these matters.

The Church is fully cognisant of the view that the hon. Gentleman expresses, which has been expressed on the Floor of the House on previous occasions. Clergy do not have legal protection against unfair dismissal, as they are not employees but office holders. As part of formulating the Church's response to the DTI on 11 December, we are examining the employment status of atypical workers. Consideration will be given to the issue, and the hon. Gentleman's comments and support will be helpful to the Church.

Mr. Edwards: My hon. Friend may recall the question I put to the Prime Minister on this very issue. I have some faith that the Government will be persuaded to grant employment rights to clergy and ministers of religion, but less faith that the Church will campaign for that as vigorously as it could. May I urge my hon. Friend to work with the Church Commissioners to ensure that the submission they make to the consultation supports the campaign for employment rights for clergy?

Mr. Bell: Yes, I was in the House when my hon. Friend put that passionate question to the Prime Minister, and I think that we all felt for him at the time. The person to whom he was referring is not in the Church of England but in another Church. We have campaigned on the matter, and thanks to my hon. Friend the Member for Wirral, South (Mr. Chapman), who has also asked a question, there has been a consistent campaign in the House for five years. The Church is listening carefully and the bishops have discussed the matter. I am hopeful that we will come to a conclusion that will satisfy my hon. Friend the Member for Monmouth (Mr. Edwards) and the House.

Mr. Chapman: It is important that we move forward from this out-of-date position whereby the clergy have spiritual rather than temporal contracts and poor conditions of service, and they are effectively excluded from employment rights and legislation. It is good that we will have an early announcement, and I hope that it is as positive as hon. Members have suggested it ought to be.

Mr. Bell: The Church of England is working closely with ecumenical partners on this issue because it realises that it crosses many boundaries and involves many Churches.

The hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) mentioned stipends. In the 1990s the national average stipend was £11,668, and by 2001 it was £17,030, so we are generous to our clergy. We hope to move to a salary of £20,000, and that fact should be recognised as we consider employment rights.

Assets

37. **Sir Sydney Chapman** (Chipping Barnet): To ask the hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners, what assessment he has made of the effect on the Church Commissioners' assets of the fall in the value of shares. [81531]

Second Church Estates Commissioner (Mr. Stuart Bell): Following their detailed triennial review as at the end of 2000, the Commissioners' actuaries carried out an interim review of the fund's position at the end of 2001 and concluded that the forecast distributions for

2002–04 were not likely to lead to an adverse consequence for the long-term financial position of the Commissioners.

Sir Sydney Chapman: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that answer. Does he recall that a few years ago the Commissioners were taken to task for allegedly investing too much of their money in property? Now that the cycle has gone full circle, does not the moral stand—that in their investments the Commissioners ought, if he will accept the phrase, to have a policy of a catholic spread?

Mr. Bell: I am always grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his contributions. When I took over this post five years ago I was assured that it had more to do with the balance sheet than the Bible, and I am happy to see that the Church's assets have increased from £3 billion to £4.5 billion under my stewardship. If victory has a thousand fathers, I may be No. 995.

In answer to the hon. Gentleman's substantive question, we have 60 per cent. of our assets in shares and the remainder in property, which means that we are less subject to the volatility of the stock exchange than we might be. Our distribution policy has not therefore been affected by a fall in shares on the stock exchanges of the world.

Mr. Peter Pike (Burnley): My hon. Friend will realise that it will be shown that the Church Commissioners could have done slightly better on the stock exchange if they did not have an ethical investment policy. However, does he accept that the majority of people in the Church and in the House believe that it is right to continue to pursue that ethical policy and that income is not always the main criterion to be taken into account?

Mr. Bell: My hon. Friend makes a pertinent point. If the Church had invested in British American Tobacco and breweries, we would be doing better on the stock side. However, we have an ethical investment policy—I nearly said ethical foreign policy—which aims to obtain the best long-term return on our investment without undue risk, and we are committed to that policy.

English Cathedrals

39. **Michael Fabricant** (Lichfield): To ask the hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners, what steps the Commission is taking to allocate sufficient funding for the maintenance of the fabric of English cathedrals. [81534]

Second Church Estates Commissioner (Mr. Stuart Bell): The Commissioners will continue to liaise closely with the Association of English Cathedrals, the body responsible for negotiations on public funding, and the Church Heritage Forum, which is now working towards a policy statement to inform development of a strategy on the future funding of church buildings.

Michael Fabricant: The hon. Gentleman mentioned the Association of English Cathedrals. Is he aware that there are two groups in that association—the wealthier cathedrals, and the respected older cathedrals such as Lichfield which may not have quite as much money. What consideration has he given to creating a sub-grouping in the association so that smaller cathedrals like Lichfield can seek additional funds, whereas cathedrals like Westminster abbey, which are well funded, may not need money so urgently?

Mr. Bell: I know that the hon. Gentleman has a strong interest in the subject—he has written to me and I wrote back on 15 November. On structures and groupings, he will be aware that each cathedral is responsible for assessing its fabric repair costs to help it meet the requirements of the Cathedrals Measure 1999 and the Care of Cathedrals Measure 1990. On the groupings to which he referred, I am happy to give any assistance I can to make it easier for cathedrals such as Lichfield to get a little extra grant.

Welfare-to-Work and Benefit Uprating

3.31 pm

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mr. Andrew Smith): With permission, Mr Speaker, I should like to make a statement on the next stage of our welfare-to-work strategy for people with health problems or disabilities and to report to the House the annual uprating of benefits.

On the benefits uprating, I can confirm that most national insurance benefits will rise by the retail prices index—that is, by 1.7 per cent. For the third year running, retirement pension will be uprated by more than the RPI, with an increase of £100 a year from next April for single pensioners and £160 a year for couples. The minimum income guarantee will rise by more than £200 a year, in line with the Government's aim of targeting extra help on the poorest pensioners. There will also be above-inflation rises in maternity allowance and statutory maternity pay, which will be uprated from £75 a week to £100. Most income-related benefits will rise by the Rossi index—1.3 per cent.—in the normal way. I shall place details of the uprating in the Vote Office and arrange for figures to be published in the *Official Report*.

Ensuring that as many people of working age as possible are in employment is central to the Government's strategy to tackle poverty and social exclusion. We inherited a major problem of worklessness, not just among those traditionally seen as unemployed, but for millions of other people who were offered little or no help to find work. Between the 1970s and the mid-1990s, the number of lone parents on benefit and the number of people claiming sickness and disability benefits both trebled. As industrial restructuring took place, one in three men aged between 50 and state pension age were out of work and reliant on benefits, and one in five men between 50 and state retirement age were receiving an incapacity benefit. At a time when many people should have been given the help they needed to find other work, they were effectively written off.

Over the past five years, we have started to tackle that legacy through economic stability and our active labour market policies, providing people with individually tailored help to move into work. As a result, employment is at record levels, with well over a million more people in work than in 1997. Long-term unemployment has been massively reduced and the number of lone parents in work continues to grow. But there is still more to do; almost 4 million people of working age are out of the labour market and on benefits. Of those, 2.7 million are receiving an incapacity benefit—nearly three times the number on jobseeker's allowance. However, as is clear from surveys, many people with health problems and disabilities want to work. Indeed, more than three quarters of a million people on incapacity benefits tell us that they want a job—just because people are on IB, it does not follow that they cannot work. Indeed, nine out of 10 people who start a claim for incapacity benefit expect to get back to work. It is right that we provide the proper support to help them to do just that.

We must continue to reform the tax and benefit system from one based on what people cannot do to one based on what they can do. For people who are off work—through illness or disability—it is often a lack of confidence or knowledge about the support and advice available which stops them getting back to work. Today, I want to announce the first steps in a new approach to remove those barriers and help people realise their potential.

Our proposals are set out in the consultation paper, "Pathways to work: Helping people into employment", which sets out a new framework of help for those who through illness or disability have applied for incapacity benefit. It combines better and more intensive advice with mandatory work-focused interviews, new opportunities for rehabilitation and new financial incentives to encourage people to move into jobs. We propose phased pilot schemes of the new approach in six areas around Great Britain from next autumn.

Let me make it very clear that this is not about forcing sick or disabled people into work. It is about encouraging people to look at their options and helping those who want to work to achieve their goal of getting a job. I should like to reassure the House that those with the most severe conditions will not be required to attend the ongoing intensive interviews. We all understand how important it is that the development of the initiative does not threaten their security and the vital support that incapacity benefit provides for them.

Our new approach has a number of aspects. First, we need to provide the right support from the outset of a claim. We will build on the framework offered through Jobcentre Plus, and ensure that new claimants get early and frequent support once their claim has been sorted out. We will train a new team of specialist personal advisers to help claimants to stay focused on their capabilities—building on their expectation that they will return to work. We want as many as possible of those moving on to incapacity benefit to be seen as people with a working future, not as people at the end of their working lives.

Secondly, some people with disabilities and health problems of course need specialist help to get back to work. In the past, that has not been available. So, we will introduce groundbreaking rehabilitation programmes, working with the national health service, general practitioners and occupational health specialists, to combine work-focused support with health-focused rehabilitation for conditions such as back pain and depression. The programmes will be tailored to people's individual needs—helping people to understand the effects of their condition and working to increase their confidence to move back into work.

Making the move from welfare to work is a big step; it creates uncertainty and, often, financial worry. There is already a range of extra help available. The disabled persons tax credit guarantees a weekly income of £167 for a single person working 30 hours. That will increase to £189 a week from April next year when new tax credits are introduced. Today I can announce that we will build on that support by piloting a return to work credit for people leaving incapacity benefit for work. It will be paid at £40 a week for 52 weeks where personal income is less than £15,000 a year. For someone returning to work for 30 hours on the national minimum wage and the new working tax credit, that will guarantee an income of at least £229 a week for the first year in work, compared with £167 under the current system, and just under £80 a week on incapacity benefit.

[Mr. Andrew Smith]

We realise, too, that the first step into work is a big one. Finding money for the first month's bus pass or for work clothes can too often be barriers to work. That is why I also announce today that we will extend access to the advisers discretion fund, enabling advisers to make awards of up to £300 to spend on anything that will help their clients move into work.

Better support for people with health problems will not stop at incapacity benefit. We will also increase support for people with less severe health problems who move from incapacity benefit to JSA, but who might none the less face significant barriers to work, by ensuring that they automatically see a specialist adviser when they first claim JSA. I can also announce that we will refer those people to tailored support through the relevant JSA new deal, without the usual waiting period of 18 months. We will further reform the system so that people awaiting an appeal are not moved on to reduced rate income support, but receive JSA and work-focused support.

People with health problems or disabilities get support from a number of sources. Today I have outlined the role that the state will play, but others have an important role, too. We want to encourage an environment where as many employers as possible are managing health at work actively and positively. That makes good business sense. In an era of full employment and a tight labour market, people with health problems or disabilities are an untapped resource that employers and the country cannot afford to ignore.

We also want to support doctors, who can sometimes face pressures to sign off people from work. There is now clear evidence of the medical, psychological and therapeutic benefits that work can have, so we will work with doctors to raise awareness of the importance of work retention or resumption in improving the health of their patients.

To conclude, this package of reforms is about providing support to help people with health problems or disabilities to move back into work. It is about them fulfilling their desire to work and realising their own ambition. It is about changing attitudes, both their own and those of others. Those claiming IB will, I believe, respond to a focus on what they can do, rather than on what they cannot do. We are not abandoning them and denying them opportunity, as in the past, but supporting them with help towards a better future.

Mr. David Willetts (Havant): I thank the Secretary of State for his statement, and welcome the uprating of benefits. Despite his devoting only seven sentences of his statement to the uprating of all social security benefits, it is important for the House to ask about the right hon. Gentleman's overall strategy for benefits, before turning to what he said specifically about incapacity benefit.

Next year, £19 billion of benefits for families, including child benefit, will have been handed over to the Treasury to satisfy the Chancellor's strange obsession with tax credits. Will the Secretary of State assure the House that they will be covered in any future uprating statements? More importantly, will the Secretary of State pledge that the different tax credits for families which will replace benefits will all be uprated annually, at least by inflation?

The benefit system is to go through enormous change over the next 18 months, with more means tests and more tax credits. I regret that in his short remarks about the uprating, the Secretary of State did not describe the measures that he was taking to deliver those changes. There is widespread concern about their practicability. The pension credit has already been delayed from April 2003 to October 2003—and the computers will not be ready even then, so the complicated new formula is supposed to run on the old computers for at least two years. Is the Secretary of State confident that he can deliver that?

With child support, the position is the other way around: the new computers are available, but they are supposed to be operating on the old formula, and we still do not know when that will start. The child support changes have already been delayed from October 2001 to April 2002. Then, a few days before that deadline, they were delayed a second time, so millions of families still have no idea when the new rules for child support will take effect. Is it this year, next year, some time or never? The uprating statement is an opportunity for the House to be informed about that.

As if the pension credit and child support changes were not enough, there are all the changes to family benefits as well. Millions of families were told that they would receive the Chancellor's new tax credits in 2003, but that plan has been abandoned. Instead, the move to the new system is supposed to take place in three stages—in April 2003, October 2003 and April 2004. Can the Secretary of State assure us that that programme for the former family benefits, for which he is still responsible, is on track?

In April 2003, the Government will start the process of paying benefits into bank accounts. Hon. Members in all parts of the House will know that that has caused great concern, especially to pensioners in our constituencies. However, we still do not have reliable information about the post office card account, and none was offered today. Will the account indeed be available, ready and operational in all post offices for April 2003? We need to know from the Secretary of State whether it will be ready on time.

We would not mind all those changes to just about every main area of benefit if they were going to give us a better system, but the reason why the Government are having such difficulty in implementing them is that they are so complicated. That is because there is so much means testing. That is what we have got—more means testing for more families, and people simply do not like such tests. Does the Secretary of State accept that that is the reason why take-up of his benefits is falling? Is that why he has not even dared to publish his figures for the take-up of benefits even for the year ending April 2001, despite the fact that they are long overdue? When will he report to the House on the take-up of benefits?

Mr. Brazier: Answer.

Mr. Willetts: Quite right. What we want from the Secretary of State, with the minimal information about the benefits system in his uprating statement, is some answers. We need to know how many people he thinks will take up his new benefits. Will he confirm that buried in his Department's own forecast is the expectation that

only two thirds of pensioners eligible for the pension credit will receive it? How many families eligible for his family credit will receive it? In the Chancellor's fantasy world, he tackles child poverty—an admirable objective to which we know he is personally committed—but he does so by assuming 100 per cent. take-up of his benefits. In the real world, there is nothing like 100 per cent. take-up, which is a very serious problem.

The Secretary of State devoted most of his statement not to the uprating of benefits, but to his particular proposals on incapacity benefit, about which I should now like to ask some questions. Will he confirm that the number of people on incapacity benefit has now been growing for two and a half years? That has happened despite the Government already having introduced some means testing of incapacity benefit claimants and years of briefing about crackdowns on disabled people who are not working, including the notorious spin last summer about the MOT tests for disabled people. Despite his glossing over the issue, the number of workless households is now rising again.

We very much hope that after years in which Ministers have talked a lot but delivered very little on disability benefits, things might be starting to change. However, in order to improve the system and genuinely to reform it, they will have to be much more honest about the problems that they have already encountered. The Secretary of State spoke as though a new deal for disabled people had not already been introduced, as well as the ONE programme and work-focused interviews for disabled people.

May I remind the Secretary of State of the evidence from his own attempts at piloting the very sort of schemes that he has once again announced today? I sometimes think that I am the only person in the country who ever reads his Department's research reports. Maybe I should have better things to do with my time. None the less, let me remind him of what his own research reports show. He talks as though there had never been a new deal for disabled people, but it has been in place for four years. I should like to quote from an evaluation of the letters sent to invite incapacity benefit claimants to interviews. His research states that, of the disabled people on incapacity benefit who received letters asking them to work-focused interviews,

"3 per cent. had responded to the invitation letter directly".

He had only a 3 per cent. success rate in even getting people to the interviews under the new deal for disabled people.

Why will the new interviews be any more successful than those that the Secretary of State has already piloted, launched and, indeed, already evaluated? If people turn up for the interviews, what will happen then? Again, an evaluation has been produced by his own Department. Let me remind him what it found when it compared the pilot areas—*[Interruption.]* I am asking him whether he is learning the lessons from his own evaluations of his own pilots. That is the question. I shall quote. In the pilot areas

"respondents in the sick or disabled group who had not participated"

in these interviews

"were more likely to be in work than were participants."

The research continues:

"This finding is not easy to explain."

In other words, the right hon. Gentleman's compulsory interviews were not effective. Why does he think that things will be any different this time round? We have had announcements, crackdowns, evaluations and pilots before. We hope that it will be different next time round, but given the Government's record I doubt very much it.

We need to know from the Secretary of State how many people he expects to participate in his pilots. How many people does he expect to find work as a result of the new schemes that he has announced? We hope that he will make a success of things. We hope also that he will learn from the many charities that work with disabled people. We hope that he will learn from the commercial sector that is involved in commercial disability insurance, such as Unum. Above all, we hope that the right hon. Gentleman will finally break free from a cycle of overspin, overhype, failed pilots and failed initiatives. If he can break free, we will support him.

Mr. Smith: I glimpsed one or two questions in the hon. Gentleman's speech. He might have started by welcoming the fact that this is the third year that the state pension has been increased by more than the retail prices index. The Conservative Government conspicuously failed to do that during every year that they were in office, except the year that they were taking money off pensioners with value added tax on fuel. Since 1997, the basic state pension has increased by £275 a year above the rate of inflation. The hon. Gentleman should welcome that.

As I have said, I glimpsed some questions. Pension credit has not been delayed. It is on course to be delivered next October, as was promised. The hon. Gentleman asked whether the stages for phasing in the introduction of the credits were on course. The answer is yes. If he does not understand why it does not make sense with such a great change to phase in the introduction, it is clear that he learned nothing from the Conservative Government's administrative failings.

The hon. Gentleman asked about post office card accounts and whether they would be ready. As I have reported to the House previously, we concluded contracts with the Post Office on the universal bank. The Post Office has assured us that the card is on course for delivery.

The hon. Gentleman referred to complications. Surely he should have learned from the lessons of the Child Support Agency. There was support on both sides of the Chamber for the original, over-complicated approach. We have had to simplify it and bring forward child support reforms.

The hon. Gentleman asked about the publication of benefits statistics. As he knows, take-up is a matter for the Office for National Statistics. I am as anxious to see the figures as he is. I hope that before the end of the month I shall be able to tell him when they will be available.

Eventually, the hon. Gentleman got round to the announcement that I have made on help for those with illness and disability.

Mr. Brazier (Canterbury): Pilots.

Mr. Smith: Surely it was sensible to pilot a groundbreaking initiative. That should be welcomed by the Opposition as it will be welcomed by many disabled people and their representative organisations throughout the country. More sensitive help and new rehabilitation are being brought forward, with new partnerships working with occupational health specialists and the national health service. New financial incentives are involved. I would have thought that £40 a week for a year for someone moving off incapacity benefit into work would be welcomed by Opposition Members.

The hon. Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts) referred to the existing new deals. We learned from them and from those who have been successfully providing the new deal for disabled people, as well as from the experience of where it has been less successful. We are considering how we can incorporate the lessons of the best practice and the good providers. The hon. Gentleman asks how many people would be affected. Depending on the pilot areas that are selected, I anticipate that it will be about 8 per cent. of the flow on to incapacity benefit in the first instance.

As I said, the benefits uprating statement is good, and includes a good proposal to help deal with the longstanding increase in those who move on to incapacity benefit by encouraging them to consider their options, and offering them new hope and help into jobs.

Mr. Frank Field (Birkenhead): I welcome the Secretary of State's uprating statement and the initiative to help those who are unemployed back to work through buying a bus pass. However, does my right hon. Friend accept that for that to be effective, there must be a bus on which they can travel? Does he know that in Birkenhead, where there are 15 per cent. unemployed, 38 per cent. of job vacancies were withdrawn at the jobcentre 20 miles down the road because no one could travel to the area to take up the jobs?

I make a plea to my right hon. Friend that when he develops his welfare-to-work strategy, which Labour Members greatly welcome, he bears it in mind that his next initiative may need to link the unemployed to where the jobs are. According to the latest data, more than 200 constituencies have fewer people in work now than when we were elected in 1997, although there are 1.5 million extra jobs in the economy. One of the reasons for high unemployment in some areas is not that people do not want to work, but that they cannot travel to where the jobs are located.

Mr. Smith: I thank my right hon. Friend for his welcome for the statement and recognition of the contribution that the bus pass can make, and the other help that access to the £300 discretionary fund can provide.

My right hon. Friend made important points. They are precisely the matters on which our action teams for jobs, based in the most disadvantaged areas where unemployment is highest, can work. I urge employers, Jobcentre Plus and the Employment Service in his constituency and elsewhere to work with the action teams for jobs to realise our provisions.

In the experience of the action teams for jobs, more than 10 per cent. of those who volunteered to take advantage of their help are incapacity benefit recipients. Moreover, that applies to more than 10 per cent. of those whom the teams got into jobs.

Mr. Steve Webb (Northavon): I thank the Secretary of State for his statement and welcome some of the measures that he has proposed to make it easier for disabled people to move into paid work.

I want to ask three questions on the aspect of the statement that the right hon. Gentleman glossed over: benefits uprating. A section of the statement is headed "Better support for people on JSA". Without mentioning sordid matters such as cash, will he explain what 1.3 per cent. means for someone on jobseeker's allowance? Will he confirm my calculation that it means 70p or 75p? Does he believe that that is a fair reflection of the increase in the cost of living that unemployed people face in the next 12 months?

Secondly, will the right hon. Gentleman confirm that the pension uprating obeys what I would call Webb's law of benefits uprating: the increase in the state pension declines with distance from the last general election? Does he confirm that the pension increased by £5 when the election was being held, by £3 the following year because a promise had to be made, but by only £2 this year?

Thirdly, will he launch an immediate and urgent internal investigation into the Department? Earlier this month, it gave a straight answer to a written question. When the Department was asked for the real value of the retirement pension in today's prices in 50 years time, it replied that it would be 75p higher than now. Will he confirm that he is again asking pensioners to accept 75p, but that this time they have to make it last for 50 years?

What sense does it make for the pension, which is supposed to be the foundation of income in old age, to increase by only 75p above inflation over half a century, when the economy will double in size?

Mr. Smith: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his welcome, if such it was, for the statement. He referred to the section on extra help for recipients of JSA. Extra help is being provided for those whose application for incapacity benefit has been turned down, and who will go on to JSA. They will be able to access early the help that the new deals provide. I hope that he will endorse that. The hon. Gentleman referred to the level of the increase. It is the inflation increase, fair and square. He also referred to the levels of increase in pensions, but, as I told the hon. Member for Havant, the cumulative impact of our pension increases, over and above inflation, is very substantial—as, indeed, it is for the poorest pensioners in receipt of the minimum income guarantee. We are making real inroads into pensioner poverty, which is something that the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) ought to welcome.

Mrs. Joan Humble (Blackpool, North and Fleetwood): Will my right hon. Friend, in expanding the work of his Department in jobcentres, take into account the excellent work done in the community by organisations such as Progress Recruitment in Blackpool, a newly incorporated company that was

previously an arm of local government? It is successfully getting people—often those with profound disabilities—into work, because it listens to what they have to say. It also listens to what employers have to say, and allays the fears of both. It matches people with appropriate jobs and offers them support so that their jobs are successful not only in the short term but in the long term. Will my right hon. Friend look at enhancing the work of such organisations?

Mr. Smith: Yes, indeed. My hon. Friend makes a good point, and I join her in congratulating groups such as Progress Recruitment on their work. There are important lessons to be learned from how the new deal for disabled people is working successfully, and from other initiatives being undertaken by voluntary organisations in the community. They will have a central role to play in the collaborative working that we envisage as a crucial part of the new pilot.

Mr. Archy Kirkwood (Roxburgh and Berwickshire): Will the Secretary of State confirm that there will, as usual, be a full debate on the uprating element of his statement? The contributions from the two Front-Bench spokesmen show that much needs to be discussed, and it would be beneficial if that could be organised before Christmas. As Chairman of the Work and Pensions Committee, I welcome the welfare-to-work aspects of his statement. The Committee is about to undertake an inquiry into that very important subject, on which I would like to ask the right hon. Gentleman two questions.

First, the Department's own research on moving from sickness into work, published in 2001, showed that it was time to examine the conceptual basis of incapacity benefit, and the way in which it is assessed. Will the consultation that the Secretary of State has launched include measures that consider the essence of how incapacity benefit is measured currently?

Secondly, the Secretary of State mentioned encouraging employers to manage health at work more actively. Does he agree that we need to use stronger language than that? If we are to create new vacancies for people who are not in good health, or who are disabled, it will take real encouragement and some pretty hard persuasion by the Government, using all their means, to establish vacancies for which disabled people can apply.

Mr. Smith: On the hon. Gentleman's first question, I expect the debate on the order to take place in the normal way. On his subsequent questions, I said in my statement that we needed to shift further the philosophy of the tax and benefit system from one based on what people cannot do to one based on what they can do. I take it that that is the sort of conceptual shift to which he referred. In the pilot areas, we shall build on the experience of the personal capability reports that will provide essential information to feed into the assessment, through which clients, jointly with Jobcentre Plus, medical advisers and those organising their rehabilitation will need to craft the right sort of programme to help them to move into jobs. There will, of course, be lessons to be learned from that process.

Of course, we need to do more to encourage employers. As I said in my statement, there is a good business case here as well. We should not miss any opportunity to put across the message that it is in a firm's own interests to have an enlightened recruitment policy, as many that have successfully recruited disabled people, or people who have suffered illness, will attest. In addition, as part of the approach that I have outlined today, the Health and Safety Executive is working with Middlesex university on a good practice guide to help employers to make the most of this kind of opportunity.

Mr. Terry Rooney (Bradford, North): I welcome the thrust of the statement, but one of the biggest barriers preventing those with disabilities, especially mental disabilities or illnesses such as epilepsy, from getting work is the attitude of employers. What work will my right hon. Friend do with his colleagues in the Department of Trade and Industry to challenge those prejudices, which, sadly, apply to all too many employers?

Mr. Smith: I am glad that my hon. Friend welcomes our proposals. We shall continue to work closely with employers through, for example, the Disability Rights Commission, to promote the responsibilities imposed by the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, including those that will apply to small as well as large firms from 2004. We shall also work through the National Employment Panel to encourage and support employers who recruit more disabled people.

Mr. Nick Gibb (Bognor Regis and Littlehampton): As the Secretary of State knows, when it comes to the quite proper allocation of further resources to the uprating of benefits and new resources to welfare-to-work schemes, his Department's accounts have been qualified owing to the huge amount of social security fraud; yet only 5 per cent. of fraudsters are prosecuted. Has he any plans to change the policy?

Mr. Smith: We take every opportunity to bear down on fraud, and to minimise the amount of fraud. As for the qualification of the accounts, we are working closely with the National Audit Office to end the present situation.

Ross Cranston (Dudley, North): I welcome the changes in incapacity benefit administration. As an old industrial area, my constituency contains a significant number of men over 50 who will be helped by the new scheme. My obvious question is this: when will it be rolled out nationally so that Dudley can benefit?

Mr. Smith: The first three pilots will begin in October next year, and three more will follow in April 2004. We shall need to learn from that experience what works best and how cost-effective the programme is before deciding on when to roll it out, but the new approach promises a great deal, and I hope that we shall be able to extend it more generally.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield): Today's statement ranged more widely than the traditional uprating statement that the House has come to expect at this time of year. Along with outside bodies that take an interest in these matters, we shall have to examine the Secretary of State's words carefully to ensure that what he has proposed will actually happen.

[Mr. Andrew Mitchell]

May I invite the right hon. Gentleman to answer the question posed by the shadow Secretary of State about the timing of the Child Support Agency reforms? May I also point out that his proposals for incapacity benefit are almost identical to those in the last Conservative party manifesto? Why does he not go the whole hog and introduce a proper integrated system?

Mr. Smith: Ours are consultative proposals, and we shall work closely with outside organisations. We shall listen to their comments, and make sure that what is implemented works well. As for the timing of the child support reforms, I wrote to all Members in September updating them on the progress of the testing of the new system. I cannot say more today, but I assure the House that, as soon as I can say when the new system will be operating, I shall seek to make a statement here.

I was not aware of a resemblance between our proposals and those of the last Conservative Government. If I had been, I might have expected a warmer welcome from Conservative Members today.

Mr. James Plaskitt (Warwick and Leamington): I particularly welcome my right hon. Friend's emphasis on the importance of piloting reforms such as these. As he will know, the ONE reform was piloted very successfully in my constituency. One thing that emerged then was the advantage of targeting and tailoring services according to the needs of individuals. Will that approach be extended to my right hon. Friend's reform of incapacity benefit?

Mr. Smith: I thank my hon. Friend for his welcome and, like him, I think that there are important lessons to be learned from the ONE pilots. Indeed, I was pleased to visit the office in his constituency when the ONE pilot was being established there. The approach needs to be individually tailored, drawing on the personal capability report as well as medical advice and advice from other occupational health specialists to ensure that we meet the needs of the individual. The barriers that people face, whether of confidence, skills or health, are very individual and the programme needs to be individually tailored.

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): Will the Secretary of State take another look at how welfare to work impacts on the more able end of the spectrum of those with learning disability and those with ongoing mental health problems? He will understand that a rather different approach is required, because they are not necessarily people who have had something wrong with them or have fallen sick and recovered. They need time. In that context, will he re-examine his changes to the therapeutic earnings rule and how it affects those people? I seek for them not jobs that are just make-work schemes, but real, paid jobs. That extra time would make a difference to them.

Mr. Smith: The hon. Lady makes some good points, and we shall continue to develop our policies in ways sensitive to those whom she describes as being at the able end of the spectrum. That is very important indeed.

In relation to the therapeutic earnings rule, it is important to understand that when an adviser or health support worker thinks that there is continuing health and personal development benefit from that work experience, it can extend beyond the initial 26 weeks and the second 26. We need also to consider those matters in line with what the hon. Lady says about the potential of those at the able end of the spectrum to see what we can do to enable them to move to self-sustaining employment. I would have thought that the right support and training for people who have been taking advantage of therapeutic earnings for up 16 hours would help them to move beyond that, extending opportunity rather than denying it. That is what the pilots are intended to provide.

Dr. Jack Cunningham (Copeland): Should not everyone welcome the important benefit upratings that my right hon. Friend has announced today and the changes in procedures that his statement envisages? Will he be rigorous, however, in ensuring that the Government's intentions and our constituents are not let down by information technology system failures, on which Whitehall, sadly, does not have a good record? Is it not obvious that, with 2.7 million people receiving incapacity benefit, many tens of thousands of them would like to work if the opportunity were there for them? I therefore welcome his imaginative proposals to give those people help, professional guidance and encouragement to rejoin the labour market. But do not they also need a new deal from employment and recruitment agencies to ensure that outdated prejudices against people with disabilities are swept away once and for all?

Mr. Smith: Yes, indeed. I thank my right hon. Friend for his welcome and the points that he makes with characteristic eloquence. He is right about changing attitudes—that is one thing that we hope the initiative will do. It is perhaps not sufficiently realised that, every year, some 150,000 people move off incapacity benefit and into jobs. Reference has been made to the new deal for disabled people, which has already helped 14,000 people off incapacity benefit and into work, so with the extra support and the tailored advice, many more people, as he advocates, can progress to jobs. As to sorting out IT system failures, my Department is working night and day to get it right.

Hywel Williams (Caernarfon): I also welcome the moves to help people with disability back to work, representing as I do an area of low economic activity that contains a large number of people with disabilities.

May I ask the Secretary of State about areas of high unemployment and extreme rurality? The statement talks about an era of full employment and a tight labour market, but that certainly is not the case in parts of the UK, parts of Wales and parts of my constituency. How will the pilot schemes address such questions in areas of high unemployment? On areas of extreme rurality, he referred to bus passes. According to the 1991 census, in my area at least, about 2 per cent. of the working population travel to work by bus. People with a

disability will find it difficult to travel to any jobs that might be appropriate. How will the scheme in the six areas address those questions?

Mr. Smith: I acknowledge the hon. Gentleman's point about the challenge not just on unemployment as conventionally recognised, but on labour market inactivity, especially in some parts of Wales. I very much hope that we will be able to operate one of the pilots in Wales precisely so that people trapped in inactivity can have a greater opportunity to get into jobs. The initiatives that we are already implementing through the action teams in the most disadvantaged areas have a lot to commend them, and I would certainly urge strong local collaboration between Jobcentre Plus and the health and occupational specialists, and with employers. There are vacancies even in areas of high unemployment, and it is crucial for people who have been trapped out of the labour market to be able to access them.

The discretionary support available for travel is not confined to bus passes. I gave that as an illustration. It can help with travel to work by other means.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): May I urge the Secretary of State to ignore the Jonahs on the Opposition Front Benches, and instead commend the excellent work that is already being done to get disabled people into work by the skilled professional advisers in jobcentres? Will he expand on the work of the action teams for jobs, such as the one in East Ayrshire, which is successfully providing minibuses for groups to get to work, and helping people with driving lessons so that they can pass their test and drive to work? All those teams are doing extremely well. Will he consider rolling out the action teams on jobs initiative to other areas, such as Girvan—an area you know very well, Mr. Speaker? Will he also confirm that one of the new, excellent pilot schemes will be in Scotland?

Mr. Smith: Yes, I hope that one of the pilots will be in Scotland. I thank my right hon. Friend for his remarks about the staff in jobcentres and elsewhere who are doing such good work in helping disabled and other unemployed people into jobs. I shall listen to what he has to say as we carry forward this initiative on action teams for jobs. I shall consider carefully his recommendation for it to be extended.

Mr. Gary Streeter (South-West Devon): If the proposals that the Secretary of State has announced have the intended impact, they deserve to be supported. However, he seemed to be establishing a new battery of special advisers, experts and others who will help disabled people to go from welfare into work. How many new advisers does he anticipate will be required for these extensive measures, and what will that cost?

Mr. Smith: As I just said, we shall draw on the expertise that is already available from disability employment advisers. We shall need to recruit and train more advisers in the pilot areas. That will have to be a collaborative effort in those areas as the initiative gets under way. The hon. Gentleman asked a sensible question about costs. It shows the scale of our commitment to this initiative that provision was secured through the spending review for extra resourcing. There will be £15 million next year and £41 million in each of the two succeeding years.

Mr. Tom Levitt (High Peak): I have no doubt that the credit of up to £40 a week for people coming off incapacity benefit into work and the grant of up to £300 for the one-off costs of going into work will be a tremendous help to people who would otherwise find that transition difficult. Will the Secretary of State help me with regard to disabled people who could work but perhaps not full-time? I am thinking of severe asthmatics and people with arthritis or ME. My constituent Joe Bush is a severe asthmatic. He is a few years from retirement, and is allowed to earn up to £66 a week on top of his incapacity benefit, but only for 26 weeks, after which he must start from scratch. What is there in this package for people like Mr. Bush, who are capable of work, but not full-time, regular work?

Mr. Smith: The provisions for therapeutic earnings are not limited to the first 26 weeks. Where it is clearly to the benefit of the client, as judged by a medical professional or by their adviser, that period can be extended. Moreover, that is one of the reasons why, in the pilots that I have put forward today, the back-to-work credit—the extra £40 a week—would not depend on someone working full time and would be available to someone working more than 16 hours a week. That greatly increases the gains from working for someone with a disability moving into a job, even when they cannot work full-time.

Paul Holmes (Chesterfield): I welcome some of the Secretary of State's comments about helping people who are on incapacity benefit back into work where that is appropriate, but the emphasis must be on "where appropriate". I should like to ask two questions in relation to that. First, he talks of compulsory interviews in the pilot areas for all but the most severe cases. What criteria will be used to determine those cases? This year, we have seen successful appeals against decisions to withdraw incapacity benefit increase from more than 40 per cent. to a massive 53 per cent. Obviously, people concerned do not want to be forced back into work when they are not ready or capable. Secondly, all the surveys undertaken by the Government and by disability organisations indicate that 40 per cent. of people with disabilities positively would welcome the chance to get back into work if they could overcome the obstacles. Many of the things that the Secretary of State said will help in that area, but why not, rather than beginning with blanket back-to-work interviews—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I have allowed the hon. Gentleman two questions. He is doing well.

Mr. Smith: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his supportive remarks. It is not a question of forcing anyone to undertake work. We will be using the existing provisions that can make work-focused interviews mandatory, and, in excepting the most severe cases, we will be guided by the personal capability report. That is precisely something on which we wish to consult as we develop the proposals, which is one of the reasons why

[Mr. Smith]

these are Green proposals today. We want to learn from those in the field, the wider public and those who represent disabled people.

Mr. Chris Pond (Gravesham): I welcome my right hon. Friend's determination not to write off people with disabilities, as occurred before 1997. In addition to the welcome measures to help disabled people into work, will he make sure that there is continuing support so that they can continue in work and do not find themselves back on benefits soon after getting into employment?

Mr. Smith: I thank my hon. Friend for his support. We shall examine how we can ensure that the support does not stop the minute someone starts work. That support must continue, so that they have that back-up, which is an essential part of the rehabilitation process.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): Why is the Secretary of State so timid and coy in failing to appreciate the significance of the problem highlighted by my hon. Friend the Member for Havant, namely that the complexity and intrusiveness of means-tested benefits are such that one third of pensioners do not claim them? Will he recognise that that is an urgent problem that needs to be urgently addressed?

Mr. Smith: I am not aware that I was being coy. As the hon. Gentleman recognises, there is a balance to be struck between simplicity on the one hand and ensuring that available resources are used most effectively to help the poorest on the other. We have been doing that; notably in respect of the huge inroads that are being made into pensioner poverty, precisely because we have brought in the minimum income guarantee and increased it in real terms by so much.

Mr. David Kidney (Stafford): I welcome the benefit upratings, especially the above-inflation increases for the state retirement pension, the minimum income guarantee and statutory maternity pay. In the case of older people on benefit who want to return to work, does my right hon. Friend also recognise the problem of age discrimination by some employers? If sticks and carrots can be applied to those employers, will he consider bridging the gap between the current voluntary code of practice and the legislation that will not be with us until 2006?

Mr. Smith: One of the programmes that we have learnt from in devising the pilots is the new deal 50-plus, where the back-to-work credit was such a success in supporting so many people back into jobs. I am aware of the problem that my hon. Friend refers to. It is why we are running the age positive campaign. Since we launched that, the proportion of job advertisements in which an age limit is specified has more than halved. Moreover, the Government are committed to bringing forward measures to tackle age discrimination through legislation.

David Cairns (Greenock and Inverclyde): A recent meeting of the all-party group on brain injury heard evidence that entirely substantiates my right hon. Friend's claim that many people with brain injuries want to work and are capable of working but lack the necessary advice and support. Can he reassure me that, among the specialisms of the new advisers that he has announced today, there will be expert knowledge on the many complex issues facing people with acquired brain injuries?

Mr. Smith: Yes. That is precisely the sort of expertise that we have drawn on in bringing forward the proposals. I referred in my statement to the medical evidence on these matters. There is the Acheson report and work by Waddell and Burton on occupational health guidelines for the management of back pain. Others have expertise in head injuries. Increasingly, the evidence shows that, in the right circumstances, the right progress back into work helps people in terms of health as well as of self-esteem. We shall draw on the expertise.

Huw Irranca-Davies (Ogmore): Does my right hon. Friend recognise that the approach tailor-made to the individual is exactly the right approach but extremely resource-intensive? Can he build on the action team for jobs and avoid the aberration where one community in one ward benefits from it, yet one equally deprived next door cannot? It has released pent-up demand and is thoroughly to be welcomed. Can he try to avoid the aberration of the postcode lottery?

Mr. Smith: Yes, except that in bringing forward pilots there will have to be boundaries to the pilot areas. I am not sure that all boundary problems will be unavoidable. We will try to do this as sensitively as possible, recognising the needs of local communities.

ASW Steel Mill

4.27 pm

Mr. Derek Wyatt (Sittingbourne and Sheppey): I beg to ask leave to move the Adjournment of the House, under Standing Order No. 24, to debate a specific and important matter that should have urgent consideration, namely, the closure of the profitable ASW steel mill at Sheerness where 190 were made redundant last week and approximately 150 will be made redundant shortly.

Roger Oldfield acts for the receivers, KPMG. He said at an open meeting in the summer at Sheerness that we would find a buyer but thought that it was unlikely that ASW Cardiff would. Last Monday, he announced the reverse and closed ASW Sheerness.

Three elements about that decision concern me. First, during September 2002, there were four bids on the table: Caparo Industries offered to buy Sheerness. Hopewell Investments offered a similar deal. Ittifaq, a Saudi company, offered to buy Sheerness but the receivers set a condition that it could only sell the product called billets outside the European Union.That was because they had had a better offer from Celsa, a Spain-based steel company. Celsa offered the higher price; it offered to buy ASW Cardiff and some parts of the Sheerness mill.

The receiver's job is to extract the highest price for his list of creditors. No one appears to regulate what he does and though both plants have received Government assistance over the years, it seems that the Government are frozen out of the procedure once a receiver is appointed. That needs to be re-examined.

Secondly, ASW Sheerness is a modern plant with an outstanding management and work force. ASW Sheerness was not closed after the holding company went into receivership in the second week of July but its counterpart in Cardiff was. I am glad that the Office of Fair Trading has accepted an invitation from me to look at the Celsa deal.

Thirdly, during the whole period from July and throughout last week, I was in constant touch with Rhodri Morgan, First Minister of the Welsh Assembly, and a number of Welsh MPs, including my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, West (Kevin Brennan), my right hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Alun Michael) and my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, North (Julie Morgan), as well as the Iron and Steel Trades Confederation. I know that they were also working with the Welsh Development Agency but here is the anomaly. In the south-east, we have a regional development agency the equivalent of the WDA, but it has little profile; it is called SEEDA. We also have a Government office for the south-east, called GOSE. Not one person from either of those offices was in touch with the ASW management or ASW workers at Sheerness: not one phone call, not one meeting—nothing. It is outrageous. I hope that the SEEDA chairman is carpeted and the chief executive of SEEDA offers his resignation, as they have badly let down my community. They are out of touch and out of sight. The south-east needs its own Minister, so that the management and work force that I represent have the same chances as our fellow citizens in Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

I hope that you will agree, Mr. Speaker, to the adjournment of business to allow the House to discuss how we can best save ASW Sheerness and ASW Cardiff.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I have listened carefully to what the hon. Gentleman has said, and I have to give my decision without stating any reasons. I am afraid that I do not consider that the matter that he has raised is appropriate for discussion under Standing Order No. 24, and I cannot therefore submit the application to the House.

Points of Order

4.31 pm

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): As you are aware, Mr. Speaker, question 6, from the hon. Member for Perth (Annabelle Ewing), was withdrawn earlier today, even though it was tabled only last Wednesday. Also, no Scottish National party MPs were present during the very important statement on pensions and benefits. Will you inquire into both those points, and ask why there has been such a lack of participation? Many of us from Scotland believe that they are only part-time Members.

Mr. Speaker: The right hon. Gentleman knows that I will not inquire into these matters.

Andrew Selous (South-West Bedfordshire): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. In view of today's widespread publicity of allegations that the Government blocked an offer to the firefighters in the summer, will you tell the House whether the Deputy Prime Minister has indicated to you that he might wish to come to the House to comment on his statement of 22 October? In it, he said:

"I did not interfere in any way with the firefighters' negotiations." —[*Official Report*, 22 October 2002; Vol. 391, c. 129.]

Mr. Speaker: I think that the Deputy Prime Minister is busily involved in negotiations.

Mr. Gary Streeter (South-West Devon): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. At the weekend, there was an alarming breach of security at the naval base in Devonport, Plymouth, when two untrained amateurs were able to gain access to the base and clamber all over a nuclear submarine. Given that we are supposed to be in a heightened state of security, may I ask whether you have received an indication from the Secretary of State for Defence that he wants to make a statement to this House today about this awful breach of security, and to reassure the people of Plymouth that security will be upgraded and that such an incident will not occur again?

Mr. Speaker: That is not a matter for the Chair.

Mr. Simon Thomas (Ceredigion): Further to the point of order raised by the right hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes), Mr. Speaker, will you bear in mind—as I am sure you will—our discussions with your office about the establishment of a joint SNP-Plaid Cymru parliamentary group, the fourth largest parliamentary grouping in this House, and the fact that members of Plaid Cymru can speak on behalf of SNP members as well? *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am just about to tell the hon. Gentleman that that is not a point of order or a matter for me.

BILL PRESENTED

INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT (FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE)

Secretary Patricia Hewitt, supported by The Prime Minister, Mr. Secretary Prescott, Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Secretary Murphy, Mrs. Secretary Liddell, Secretary Peter Hain and Alan Johnson, presented a Bill to amend section 8(5) of the Industrial Development Act 1982: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow, and to be printed. [Bill 5].

Orders of the Day

Debate on the Address

[FOURTH DAY]

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question [13 November],

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, as follows:

Most Gracious Sovereign,

We, Your Majesty's dutiful and loyal subjects, the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, in Parliament assembled, beg leave to offer our humble thanks to Your Majesty for the Gracious Speech which Your Majesty has addressed to both Houses of Parliament.—*[Mr. Foulkes.]*

Question again proposed.

Economy and Trade and Industry

4.33 pm

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Gordon Brown): At the heart of the Queen's Speech are policies for stability, enterprise and fairness—policies that in the past five years have helped to build strong economic foundations and brought us the lowest unemployment for 25 years, the lowest inflation for more than 30 years, the lowest long-term interest rates for 40 years, and the lowest debt interest payments as a share of national income for nearly 100 years. These are policies for enterprise, stability and fairness that this Queen's Speech—and, later, the Budget—will reinforce, as we overcome the uncertainties since 11 September and the most difficult world economic down-turn for 20 years. Twenty other countries, accounting for 60 per cent. of the world's output, have been in, or are in, recession, while Britain, despite world uncertainties that are felt here, has continued to grow.

In this debate on the economy and on trade and industry, my argument is that, in a world where we are more aware every day of both the opportunities and insecurities of globalisation, and the challenge constantly to upgrade our technology and skills, the best way forward for the British economy is, first, to hold firm to our policies for stability and not risk monetary or fiscal instability; and secondly, to continue to create new enterprise, new jobs and better services with reform, and to reject policies that would undermine investment, undermine our new deal for jobs, and undermine our commitment to make work pay.

Mr. Steve Webb (Northavon): There is one economic statistic about which the Chancellor is uncharacteristically coy: he never seems to mention the whopping great trade deficit. Does he believe that that is a problem, and if so, when will it be solved?

Mr. Brown: The trade deficit rose to 4 per cent. of gross domestic product under the last Government. It is now around 2 per cent. of GDP. While it is obviously better when exports are rising faster than imports, the hon. Gentleman must recognise that world trade has virtually stalled over the past two years.

I want to say something about our responsibilities in a more insecure world and to make two announcements. This is the first Queen's speech since the tragic events of 11 September. Over the past year, we have worked ever more closely with the United States of America and other authorities not only to confront the threat of terrorism but to cut off the finance that makes it possible. I can tell the House of the progress that we have made, starting with the $100 million of assets of more than 100 organisations and 200 individuals suspected of terrorist financing that have been frozen.

The new terrorist finance unit has been passed 3,500 suspicious reports, and 600 have been referred to Scotland Yard. There have been 20 arrests in connection with terrorist fundraising, and 15 people have subsequently been charged. The first conviction for terrorist financing has taken place in the United Kingdom under the Terrorism Act 2000. As the House knows, police have acted swiftly against suspects here in London, with a substantial seizure of terrorist funds last week. Only yesterday, there was another significant seizure from an al-Qaeda suspect listed by the United Nations. Tomorrow, I will make a further announcement that adds to our list of individuals and organisations designated because they are suspected of financing terrorism. Next week, the US Treasury Secretary, Paul O'Neill, will visit Britain, and our common aim, working together, is to ensure that every financial centre in the world has measures in place to identify, and then stop the flow of funds to, terrorists. I believe that I will have the support of the whole House when I say that we must take all the steps necessary to intercept, root out and cut off all the sources of terrorist finance.

As we insist on exchange of information not only to stop and track terrorist financing but to tackle money laundering and tax avoidance, I want to thank Jersey, Guernsey, the Isle of Man and the Caribbean authorities for their co-operation, and so that all countries are included, I can announce that we will do all that is necessary to ensure that the Cayman Islands joins the list of territories offering full exchange of information.

Not only because of 11 September, but with events unfolding in Iraq, high oil prices, the problems that we know with the IT sector, the danger of contagion from further emer[illegible]g markets where there is instability, and remaining major current account imbalances between major economies, the ongoing uncertainties facing the world economy are unprecedented in number and more widespread than at any time in our recent economic history.

Of the 20 of the world's biggest economies that have been or are in recession, the US was in recession for three quarters of 2001, as was Germany, and Japan was in recession for most of last year, resulting in a contraction of output. The global economic background to this year's Queen's Speech, as for the pre-Budget report next week, is, continent by continent, throughout Europe, America and Asia, the first simultaneous world slowdown for almost 30 years. The G7 countries as a group are experiencing the sharpest annual reduction in growth since the recession of 1974 and the worst deterioration in their industrial activity since that oil crisis. As a result, there are the largest increases in Government deficits around the world since the series of figures began in the 1970s.

[Mr. Brown]

Beyond the G7 group, the sharpest contraction is taking place in world economic growth also since 1974, and world trade, which was rising by 13 per cent. two years ago, was at a standstill last year and is barely growing this year.

Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell): Does the Chancellor believe that the situation in Germany is cyclical, or does he agree that there are also longer-term structural problems affecting that economy?

Mr. Brown: I talked about this last week, when we debated the matter at Question Time. The Germans believe that their deficit will fall below 3 per cent. within the next two years. That is why they have announced today measures to cut their budget deficit and a rise in capital gains tax and said that they intend to deal with public expenditure. As I said last Thursday in the House, the stability and growth pact should take account of cyclical factors and investment. There is no doubt that countries with low debt to GDP ratios are in a better position to be able to borrow for investment. I believe that the stability and growth pact needs that reform to enable a cyclical problem to be taken into account. The right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) might wish to comment on the pact, as he was one of those who negotiated it and is probably the only Member of Parliament who now supports it.

I believe that most hon. Members will agree that in this period of continuing uncertainty, we should continue to steer a course of stability, be vigilant to the risks, maintain strong fundamentals, and be ready to act decisively with our international partners with the toughness and determination to take the right long-term decisions. Here in Britain, we will not be diverted from that tough and disciplined approach. There will no risks taken with inflation and no attempt at the old quick fixes, and just as we must have continued discipline on pay in the private sector, it is essential that there be continued discipline in our approach to public sector pay.

When the issue is how we can maintain growth and employment in an uncertain and unstable world, it is exactly the wrong time, with the wrong claim, pursuing the wrong methods, to demand wage rises that are so much higher than inflation that they would, if they were repeated across the public sector, lead to a rise in the wage bill that no prudent and responsible Government could be expected to finance. Every additional 1 per cent. on the nation's pay bill costs an additional £1 billion. To have to pay excessive wage rises would be at the cost of jobs or other investment in public services. That is why we must have the strength to take the right long-term decisions for our country.

This morning, my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister met the firefighters leader to discuss safety issues. Those discussions were encouraging and we hope that the local authority employers and the firefighters will return to the negotiating table this week to discuss pay and modernisation. Every pay negotiation demands responsibility on all sides, and every pay rise must be related to productivity so that investment is matched by reform.

Mr. David Cameron (Witney): In the light of what the Chancellor has just said and what the Governor of the Bank of England said yesterday on "Breakfast with Frost", will the right hon. Gentleman explain why ACAS workers—who I am sure will be busy—have had a pay rise of 17 per cent., Welsh Assembly staff have had a pay rise of 22 per cent., and Ministry of Defence staff have had a pay rise of 20 per cent.? Why did we not hear such fulminations when they were happening?

Mr. Brown: Overall rises in public sector pay over the past five years have been less than rises in private sector pay. The ACAS settlement was to make good problems that arose from the application of the Equal Pay Act 1970. Every pay rise within the public sector has to be related to the needs of the sector and productivity—but we take no lectures from one who was a special adviser to Lord Lamont when he was Chancellor of the Exchequer.

It is by holding fast to our economic disciplines that Britain, despite the world slowdown, has not only achieved low inflation and low interest rates, but managed to combine low inflation with low unemployment—indeed, the lowest unemployment for 25 years. Today, Britain has the lowest unemployment among men since 1979, the lowest unemployment among women since 1976, and the lowest long-term and youth unemployment since 1975. The International Labour Organisation unemployment rate is 8.3 per cent. in Germany, 8.6 per cent. in France, and 8.3 per cent. in the euro area as a whole, while in the United Kingdom it is 5.3 per cent.—more than 50 per cent. lower. Today, unemployment in Britain is lower than in Europe, Japan and America together for the first time since the second world war.

I believe that we are better placed because our monetary regime was designed not only for times of high growth, but for times of global difficulty as well. Because that regime has established credibility by meeting our inflation target year after year, the Bank of England has the capacity to make the right decisions at the right time for the long-term interests of the British economy. In the same way, it is because our fiscal rules are set for the long term that our fiscal policy can adjust to the economic cycle, with the automatic stabilisers able to play a full role. Fiscal and monetary policy can respond because we have kept within the sustainable investment rule, which demands that debt be less than 40 per cent. of GDP.

It is precisely because we have created a fiscal and monetary regime that targets inflation with a symmetrical target, works within clear rules and requires low debt before investment, and is therefore rigorous and disciplined, that during the recent downturn we have been able to respond to the world economic cycle, its risks and uncertainties. Although not immune to the downturn, we are one of the few countries to have averted recession in the past few years. The figures show that in a global downturn deeper and more serious than that of the early '90s, Britain is doing better than the rest of the world, whereas in the early '90s, faced with a lesser contraction in global growth and output, Britain did far worse.

Let us remember that in that earlier downturn the world economy continued to grow but we contracted by 1.5 per cent. Today, with the world in a worse growth trajectory, we continue to grow. Indeed, last year, growth in the UK was the fastest in the G7 countries. Instead of being, as in previous downturns, first in and last out of recession—the country that suffers most—we have continued to grow.

Let us remember also that, in the last world downturn, interest rates were above 10 per cent. for three years and at 15 per cent. for an entire year. No one will ever forget the 250,000 mortgage repossessions or the negative equity that affected 1.5 million homeowners and, for many, lasted nearly a decade. It is because we have consistently achieved low inflation, which averaged 6 per cent. under the previous Conservative Government but is 2.3 per cent. under Labour, because debt has reduced from 44 to 30 per cent. of GDP and because we have achieved lower interest rates, that the UK, spared 10 per cent. inflation and 15 per cent. interest rates, is in a stronger position to maintain our economy, sustain high employment and meet our commitments to health, education and the public services.

Mr. Jonathan Djanogly (Huntingdon): The Chancellor has repeatedly referred to increased employment, but is it not the case that it is the public sector that has been growing, while the private sector has had massive job losses?

Mr. Brown: No, both the public and private sector have been growing over the past year, and the vast bulk of the 1.5 million jobs created in the economy in the past five years are in the private sector. I should have thought that the hon. Gentleman would be the first to congratulate us on that.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): The Chancellor mentioned negative equity and the problems that it causes. Does he expect to see negative equity in the property market in this country in the next two years?

Mr. Brown: It is certainly true that house prices, as a share of income, have risen a great deal, but it is also true that because interest rates are low, mortgage rates, as a share of the income of people buying houses and of those who already have houses, are lower than at other times. Whereas, in the early 1990s, mortgage payments were about 36 per cent. of the average income of a house buyer, they are now about 14 per cent., which is why people have been in a position to make their mortgage payments.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke (Rushcliffe): The Chancellor is supplying many hostages to fortune. Had he forgotten, when he replied to my hon. Friend the Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Djanogly), that in the third quarter of this year the number of full-time jobs in the private sector fell by 72,000?

Mr. Brown: The right hon. and learned Gentleman cannot deny that 1.5 million jobs have been created in the last five years and that half of the jobs created in the last year are in the private sector. At the same time, we have the lowest claimant unemployment that this country has seen for 25 years.

I listen carefully to the right hon. and learned Gentleman because his contributions give an added dimension to Tory party thinking, given that he normally disagrees with his Front-Bench colleagues, and I have followed carefully what he has been saying over the last few years. He said in 1997 that he was against the independence of the Bank of England and he predicted that there would be a recession. He then said that we were wrong not to keep to the spending rules when we cut debt so that we are in a position to borrow at times that are more difficult for the economy, and he now says that our spending is unacceptable. It seems—this may give comfort to the shadow Chancellor—that on every major issue since 1997 the right hon. and learned Gentleman has been wrong, and he is wrong, of course, in being the only person in the past week to come out in favour of the existing interpretation of the stability pact.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke *rose—*

Mr. Brown: I will give way once more so that the full views of the Conservative party are represented.

Mr. Clarke: I shall refer to some of the inaccurate descriptions of my forecast when I get the chance, if I catch your eye, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The only reason why the Chancellor is defending the growth and stability pact is that he does not want to raise taxes before the next election, so the only criticism of my forecast may turn out to be its timing, which could be extremely embarrassing for him when tax and spend on the present scale finally comes home to roost.

Mr. Brown: In 1997, the right hon. and learned Gentleman said:

> "Gordon Brown's claim that he could control public spending is beyond belief. Hell will freeze over before Gordon Brown could control spending."

We kept to our two-year spending guideline and we maintain the view that I have expressed continuously since 1997: the stability pact, which, unfortunately, the right hon. and learned Gentleman must take some credit for negotiating, must be reformed to make it more consistent with the needs of the economic cycle—which, many people now accept, is affected by what is happening in Europe—with the need to recognise investment as an important part of public spending and with the need to recognise that countries such as ours with low levels of debt, compared with others with high levels of debt, are in a position to borrow, whereas others are not.

In the last world downturn in the early 1990s, employment fell by 3.5 per cent, and unemployment rose by almost 1.4 million. Today, as I have said, employment has risen, with 1.5 million more jobs since 1997. The record is undeniable—world conditions are worse now than in the early 1990s, but Britain is doing better. When world conditions were relatively better in the early 1990s, Britain did not just relatively worse, but decisively worse.

[Mr. Brown]

Labour has attacked the previous Tory Government's record. The Liberals, of course, continue to attack their record. Home owners and industry have attacked it, and so have the British people. I watched the Conservative party conference, where Tories were attacking it. It was even attacked by the Tory party chairman and the Tory leader, or should I say the current Tory leader? In an interview with *The Sunday Telegraph* on 6 October—*[Interruption.]* I think that the Opposition should listen to their own leader. Speaking about the early 1990s, he said that

"businesses went to the wall, we broke our pledge on taxes, there was negative equity in homes, the public felt hurt. Then we lectured them, and we seemed arrogant. We said it was all your fault, not our fault—you are the problem, not us . . . they still remember that we were in power, and that is what we left them with."

So who are the guilty men, and where are they now? Where was the shadow Chancellor when all that was happening? He held three Cabinet posts, but perhaps he did not attend Cabinet meetings. The Tory chairwoman has said:

"You know what some people call us—the nasty party".

To whom was she referring? When she said that Tory Ministers were unrepentant and unattractive, whom did she have in mind? She said that the previous Government were arrogant. Is there a specific exemption for the shadow Chancellor because he has been so humble? The current Leader of the Opposition said that the previous Tory Government were uncaring, but was not the shadow Chancellor Employment Secretary when unemployment went up by 1.5 million, and did he not destroy the employment programmes that were in place? The Tory chairwoman said that the previous Government were incompetent and broke their promises, but was it not the shadow Chancellor who, as Employment Secretary, was reporting every month on inflation, which rose to 10 per cent., and interest rates to 15 per cent.?

Was it not the shadow Chancellor who had ministerial responsibility for financial services when there was pensions mis-selling? Was he not also Home Secretary? Under the Tories, crime doubled. The Tories complain that the last Government were hectoring and lectured people, but was it not the shadow Chancellor who, as Minister for Local Government, told us—indeed, insisted—that the poll tax that he was introducing was clear, simple and fair? The record that is being denounced by the Tories' current leader is the record of the poll tax-introducing, inflation-raising, unemployment-creating, pensions mis-selling, crime-doubling shadow Chancellor, so it is difficult to take lectures from him.

Now, the shadow Chancellor is showing the same good judgment about the economy. He says that Britain is

"less well placed to weather any world economic slowdown",

and that the British economy is

"less able to withstand the dreadful events of September 11th and their economic consequences".

However, I have just given the figures for 20 countries in recession and for Britain's continued growth.

Since 1997, every shadow Chancellor has made forecasts of gloom. We had four shadow Chancellors before the right hon. and learned Gentleman, all of whom predicted recessions. It was not the recessions that came and went—it was the shadow Chancellors. Now we have a fifth shadow Chancellor predicting the worst for the economy—I just wonder what the sixth will say. I ask the right hon. and learned Gentleman and his colleagues on the Front Bench: what is Conservative policy on monetary and fiscal matters? Does anyone know? Does anyone care?

During the 1980s and 1990s, when other countries were making decisions on central bank independence, the Conservatives could have made the Bank of England independent. Even after 1997—even after we had made the Bank of England independent—the shadow Chancellor continued to oppose the decision.

What of the fiscal disciplines? I see that it is now the shadow Chancellor's argument that ours are too lax, despite the fact that in a speech in April he said that neither of the Government's fiscal rules

"is entirely new. The golden rule was anticipated in Ken Clarke's last budget document . . . the origins of the sustainable investment rule can be traced to Tim Congdon's 1976 proposal . . . that was incorporated into policy in the 1980s."

In April, the right hon. and learned Gentleman was claiming authorship of the golden rule and other fiscal rules, but he now questions their validity.

If the shadow Chancellor agrees with fiscal discipline, has he in mind another fiscal rule? What fiscal rules would the Conservative party follow? Would it go back to the balanced budget rule, for which the right hon. and learned Gentleman argued in 1997—a rule that would mean that we would have to cut billions of pounds from investment in education, health and other public services?

Would the Tories follow the ideological rule, which reveals the truth about the shadow Chancellor and the Conservative party? That is the one that the right hon. and learned Gentleman set out when he stood for the Conservative leadership and received 23 votes in 1997, but has sought to keep quiet about since. He said:

"For the past few years we have held real spending growth to 1 per cent. per year . . . We had planned to maintain that performance over the course of this Parliament."

If he had got his way, spending by 2006 would have been £72 billion less than we plan it to be.

Is the shadow Chancellor's fiscal rule the one that he also enunciated in 1997: that public spending should be cut to 35 per cent. of GDP? Let us remember what he said:

"I believe our aim should now be to reduce the proportion of national output taken by the state towards 35 per cent . . . I believe that 35 per cent. is a realistic and attainable long-term goal."

By the end of our spending round, that would mean £78 billion a year less—the equivalent of the entire UK hospitals budget. Each of those rules would mean massive cuts in our public services. That explains so clearly why the shadow Chancellor will not commit himself to matching our health and education spending plans.

The Conservatives can visit housing estates, single-parent clubs and night shelters, and talk about compassion for the poor and how they are helping the

vulnerable and supporting public services, but if, as at the last election, they refuse at the next election to match us on education and health, we will ensure that they will have to spend all their time explaining which hospitals or schools will close and how many nurses, doctors and teachers will lose their jobs under their plans. We will pursue them into every constituency to explain what their plans will mean for British families and people across Britain.

Chris Grayling: Perhaps the Chancellor can answer a question that has puzzled me for some years. He says that the policies that he inherited in 1997 were built on Tory economic and spending guidelines. If the policies were so fundamentally wrong, why has he spent five years talking about their virtues?

Mr. Brown: I did not say that; I said that after 1997 we, first, made the Bank of England independent; secondly, we devised a new monetary regime that was based, unlike the Tories' regime, on a symmetrical inflation target; and, thirdly, we introduced new fiscal rules so that we could reduce the debt, which rose under the Conservatives, by not spending additional moneys over the first two years. The result is that we have cut debt, which had been rising under the Conservatives, from 44 per cent. to 30 per cent. of GDP. I should have thought that the hon. Gentleman would want to congratulate us on our prudence and the stability that we have tried to create for the British economy.

Having created a platform of greater stability with clear monetary and fiscal rules—unlike those of the Conservative party—the next stage is to make Britain better equipped to face the new challenges of globalisation, with more competition, more business creation, more investment and a more skilled work force. So, in the Queen's Speech, we have matched last Session's Enterprise Act 2002 with measures that will open up competition, which will be in a water Bill; with measures that will reduce barriers to entrepreneurship; and with measures to reduce planning delays by introducing business planning zones, which will be in a planning Bill.

At any point in the past 20 years, it was open to the Government of the day to make our competition authorities, like the Bank of England, independent and free of political influence. At any point, it was open to them to reform the insolvency laws. At any point, it was open to them to cut capital gains tax from 40p to 10p for business assets held for two years or more, to create a more favourable tax regime for capital gains than that of the United States. At any time over recent decades, it was open to the Government of the day to cut corporation tax from 33p to 30p, to create the lowest corporate tax in our history. I am pleased that it is this Labour Government and the Budgets that we have introduced that are pushing forward this agenda for business prosperity.

At any time in the past 20 years, a Government could have reduced the tax on small companies. It was open to the previous Government to introduce a new flat rate and simplified system for payment of VAT to replace accounting for every VAT item, thus cutting form-filling for nearly 700,000 businesses. We should be pleased that it is a Labour Government who have reformed VAT, cut the small companies tax rate from 23p to 19p and reduced the new starting rate to zero for 150,000 small companies.

Andrew Selous (South-West Bedfordshire): What does the Chancellor say about the statement from the Confederation of British Industry last week that the £47 billion that he has taken from British business is enough, and that if he goes any further, we will not have the money to pay for the services that he has been describing?

Mr. Brown: The CBI welcomed what we achieved on stability and continues to do so, whereas it criticised the last Conservative Government every year. On tax, it is hardly surprising that the CBI, representing businesses, should press for less taxation of business, but I point out to the CBI, as I point out to the House, that we have reduced corporation tax from 33p to 30p, that the small business tax is now at 19p and that we have eliminated the 10p band, so that the first £10,000 of a small company's profits are not subject to taxation. In all these ways, including the cuts in capital gains tax, we are helping business. We should be pleased that it is a Labour Government who have cut corporation tax in this way, and in the Queen' Speech it is a Labour Government who are extending competition and introducing much needed planning reforms that will remove the need in many areas for detailed planning permission.

These announcements are just the start. In the pre-Budget report, working in partnership with local authorities and regional development agencies, we will designate 2,000 new enterprise areas, so that we can encourage home-grown economic activity in areas that were formerly areas of high unemployment, by cutting the cost of starting up, investing, employing, training and managing the payroll for those businesses.

At the heart of our response to the world economic downturn and the challenge of globalisation are policies for more flexible labour markets to raise employment and make work pay, and policies for family prosperity, including a child tax credit and a pension tax credit. I want to explain why, at every point, our policies are right for this country, and why we reject as wrong the policies of the Conservative party.

When the previous Government were in power, long-term unemployment among young people went as high as 350,000. By contrast, it is now less than 6,000. What was an average of 500 per constituency is now an average of nine per constituency—single figures. This was the purpose and the achievement of the new deal, with 1.7 million participants, 830,000 young people and, for the long-term unemployed, more than 500,000 participants.

However, this is not the time to relax. Instead, we must accelerate our efforts in pursuit of the goal of full employment in the longer term, not just in one region, but in all parts of Britain. Where vacancies exist side by side with large numbers of unemployed, we are introducing intensive targeted initiatives to help the unemployed back to work and to break the destructive culture summed up by the claim, "No one around here works", which damages areas and diminishes people's hopes. In pilot areas, we plan to test a more intensive

[Mr. Brown]

approach to tackle the worst concentrations of unemployment street by street and estate by estate. As we insist on unemployed adults and young people going back into work, we will identify the barriers to their employability, offer them training, advice and sometimes cash help, and link them to the jobs that exist in their vicinity.

Yet the new deal, which has helped nearly 2 million men and women, has been opposed throughout by the Conservative party. The work spokesman for the Conservatives said:

"We would not have had the new deal . . . we would not have had the windfall tax on the public utilities."

He said that the new deal was

"making no improvement to the job opportunities of young people."—[*Official Report*, 11 March 1999; Vol. 327, c. 522.]

Mr. Djanogly: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Brown: I have already given way to the hon. Gentleman.

The hon. Member for Havant (Mr. Willetts) also said:

"The new deal has had no effect whatever."—[*Official Report*, 27 March 2000; Vol. 347, c. 53.]

But let us remind Opposition Members of the effect: a 75 per cent. reduction in youth and long-term unemployment in this country. What is now the policy of the Opposition? Do they support the new deal or not?

When the shadow Chancellor was Secretary of State for Employment, he cut the enterprise allowance scheme, jobstart and the job share programme. Even as jobs were being cut, he was cutting help for the jobless. The question is: do we want the Labour policy, which has created 1.5 million more jobs, or do we want the shadow Chancellor's policy as it was when he was Employment Secretary and 1 million jobs disappeared?

The difference is not only about employment, but about making work pay. Our policy is to ensure that work will pay more than benefits, so we have introduced the working families tax credit and are now ready to expand it to make work pay. For the first time, next April, single persons and couples aged 25 or over without children will be eligible for in-work support that makes jobs pay. Couples with wages of less than £280 a week or £14,000 a year and single people with less than £10,000 a year will start to gain from that tax cut.

In return for the responsibility to take up the opportunities that are available, the working tax credit fulfils our promise not simply to families with children, but to single people and couples without children, to make work pay by paying more to be in work than to be on benefits. We have introduced those changes on the foundation and building block of the national minimum wage—it could not have been done otherwise—which is now £4.20 an hour and covers 1.2 million people. Through the new chairman of the Low Pay Commission, we are now reviewing that rate.

What is the Conservative policy on that issue? Let me read out what the shadow Chancellor said when we discussed the minimum wage while he was Employment Secretary. He said that it would

"wreck our economy . . . smash job prospects"

and

"add up to 2 million people to the ranks of the unemployed."—[*Official Report*, 9 July 1991; Vol. 194 c. 795–97.]

He said that it

"would mean increased inflation and maximum unemployment . . . and drive out investors."

He later said:

"The minimum wage is Labour's axe on jobs"

and that it was

"not just a threat to jobs: it would damage every indicator of economic performance. The minimum wage would raise inflation, reduce growth, undermine the value of the currency"—

and that comes from the Conservatives. He also said that it would "send unemployment soaring". Of course, we know that he is an expert on inflation and unemployment. He said that a minimum wage would cost at least 1 million jobs. At least he got the number right; under the minimum wage, Britain has not lost 1 million jobs, but created them. Does he now admit that he got it wrong, and will he now accept the minimum wage?

What does the right hon. and learned Gentleman's party have to say about tax credits? The Conservatives now oppose tax credits, yet tax credits and the integration of tax and benefit were introduced in the United States of America by Ronald Reagan. They are supported by President Bush, who has just raised the tax credit. Ronald Reagan said that it was

"the best anti-poverty, the best pro-family, the best job creation measure to come out of Congress."

That integration of tax and benefits was supported by the Conservative party in 1974 and 1979. The former Secretary of State for Social Security, Norman Fowler, said that he was prevented from pursuing such a policy when he held that position. On the pension credit, he said only a few months ago in the House of Lords:

"To be frank, I should have preferred it if my government had introduced the pension credit . . . It is long overdue, and my hope is that it will provide support for some of the most deserving people in this country."—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 18 December 2001; Vol. 630, c. 165.]

The shadow Home Secretary, one of the few people in the Conservative shadow Cabinet who is prepared to say what he thinks, said:

"I think that some aspects of the Budget are admirable . . . aspects that should be welcomed include the general principle of transferring from one form of benefit to a tax credit."—[*Official Report*, 19 March 1999; Vol. 308, c. 1492.]

The Leader of the Opposition opposes tax credits. He said:

"we would cut the working families tax credit . . . saving us all money . . . stop wasting our time".—[*Official Report*, 19 October 1998; Vol. 317, c. 951.]

We have a policy that was supported by the Conservative party in the 1960s and 1970s. Presidents Reagan and Bush also supported it. It is even supported by the shadow Tory Home Secretary. However, with the rightwards lurch of the Tory party, it does not have the support of the shadow Chancellor and the Opposition Front Bench. On the minimum wage and on tax credit, the Conservatives are completely out of touch with the people.

Sir Peter Tapsell (Louth and Horncastle): I congratulate the Chancellor on his conversion to

Reagan economics, but will he follow the example of Reagan and start reducing taxes across the board instead of increasing them all the time?

Mr. Brown: I remember that it was a Republican Administration who ran up the greatest deficit ever as a result of not being able to take the right decisions. The key issue is that we do not allow ourselves to return to the days of Conservative government of the early 1990s, when we had a £50 billion deficit—it rose to 8 per cent. of gross domestic product—that led to 22 tax rises, despite the promise that the Conservatives made at the election that they would never increase taxes. I am determined that we will pursue prudent and responsible public finances, even if the shadow Chancellor cannot begin to tell us what his fiscal rules will be.

We shall announce the new level of the pension credit, which will be introduced in October. I can confirm that the winter fuel payment is being sent out now. The free television licence is worth £112 for the elderly. The shadow Secretary of State for Work and Pensions wanted to take it away from pensioners, but it will continue. For tomorrow's pensioners, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions will shortly publish our Green Paper on pensions.

The Tories would cut investment in education, and in every major public service. We know that in the modern economy we cannot afford to waste the potential of one child. Investment per school pupil will rise from just under £2,500 a year under the Conservatives to £5,000 a year on average per pupil—twice as much—by 2006. That requires 10,000 more teachers, 50,000 more classroom assistants, 20,000 schools renovated and the right to nursery education for not only every four-year-old but every three-year-old.

The new resources that we will put in will be accompanied by reforms—for example, freedoms and flexibilities for head teachers through the direct payments that were introduced in previous Budgets; a reduction in ring-fenced funding; new incentives for successful schools; new specialist schools and city academies; a national roll-out of education maintenance allowances to persuade young people to stay on at school and get qualifications, even when their families do not have the income to support that; and further education reform under the paper that is to be published this week to increase opportunities for post-16-year-olds, including an expansion in the number of modern apprenticeships. We shall widen access to higher education. University reforms will be outlined by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Skills in the new year.

Again, there are questions for the Opposition. They refuse to match us on education spending. They say that we are spending too much on [illegible] can they claim that it is not cost-effective for expenditure on education to rise to £5,000 per pupil when they are prepared to spend money on assisted places schemes for pupils to go to private schools that charge an average £9,000 a year? We say that it benefits the nation to invest substantially not only in some pupils at some schools but in every pupil at every school.

Matthew Taylor (Truro and St. Austell): As it appears that each member of the Cabinet is to have a free vote on university top-up fees, will the right hon. Gentleman tell the House whether he believes that top-up fees are an acceptable way forward for higher education?

Mr. Brown: I know that the Liberals will oppose every change that we even consider. Even on the Queen's Speech—I know that I share common ground with the shadow Chancellor on this—the other shadow Chancellor has set out 19 new spending proposals. That is on top of the Liberal Democrats' calls since the previous Queen's Speech for an end to prescription charges and for free personal care for the elderly. I could go through the list.

The hon. Member for Truro and St. Austell (Matthew Taylor) would like to support us on university funding because we are increasing it to 2006. We will honour our manifesto commitment on top-up fees, and he, like everyone else, will have to be patient and wait until the White Paper on universities is published. However, he cannot go on claiming that he will spend more and more on everything. At some time, the Liberal party, and the hon. Gentleman with his new, dignified title of shadow Chancellor, will have to face up to their responsibilities.

Let us consider the national health service. To ensure that it has the resources that it needs, we announced in the Budget the largest sustained increase in funding in NHS history: 7.4 per cent. a year for five years, thus raising spending to £90 billion by 2008. We also announced that spending on social services would increase. As the Queen's Speech makes clear, resources will be matched by reform. That includes: NHS foundation hospitals with growing devolution of money; multi-year budgets; flexibility down to primary care trusts and hospital trusts; payment by results; new and streamlined audit and inspection, with new national regulators; an annual report to Parliament and local reporting. The public have a right to know how health service money is being spent.

Mr. David Wilshire (Spelthorne): Will the Chancellor give way?

Mr. Brown: I have given way enough.

Reform and investment will reduce waiting lists and times. I believe that the British people will listen to what we say about taxation to pay for the NHS. Like us, they will agree to put public services before tax cuts; like us, they know that a properly funded NHS through general taxation is the best insurance policy in the world. It is clear that the difference lies between those of us who want to invest in the NHS and public services and those who want to introduce and subsidise private medicine.

Let us consider Conservative policy again. In the general election campaign, the Conservatives said that they would match us on spending on hospitals and the health service. After the election, they decided that that was too moderate and left wing. Now, they refuse to match us on health service spending. Worse, they prefer subsidies for private medical insurance and subsidies for private operations to spending on the NHS.

[Mr. Brown]

How would the shadow Chancellor fund private insurance tax relief at a cost of at least £500 million? How would he fund subsidies for private operations at a cost of £1 billion? How does he square a precise and absolute commitment to spending public funds on subsidising private medicine with his failure to make any commitment to financing the NHS?

Does not it say something about today's Tories that their first pre-election commitment is not to the NHS but to subsidising private medicine? They used to tell us that they could not give us their spending commitments because they would make no early decisions. After claiming for a year that they would not make spending commitments on health, they were prepared at their party conference to make them on private medicine but not on the NHS. There is no better illustration of the priorities of today's Conservative party. It is not that they cannot but that they will not announce their commitment to the NHS.

It matters more to Conservatives to finance one person on BUPA than to fund the 50 million people who depend on the NHS. Dogma, not economics, leads them to deny the health service money. Let us remember the letter that the shadow Chief Secretary, who is present this afternoon, wrote to the shadow Chancellor a few months ago. It stated that the reforms that he proposed

"will require a degree of charging for healthcare services . . . The reforms which we will propose . . . entail those who can afford it making some payment for healthcare services."

Such a policy leads to vouchers, extra charges and privatisation. The Conservative party has again become the party of public spending cuts and privatisation. It has become the party that is not for but against the health service and public services.

In the most difficult world economic circumstances, the Queen's Speech tells the country that even in exacting times, the Government will continue to steer a course of stability. We will reject the Opposition's policies for instability, unemployment, cuts in public services and undermining family and pensioner prosperity. Instead, we will pursue policies for a strong economy with employment opportunities for all, strong public services and a Britain that is enterprising and fair. I commend the Queen's Speech to hon. Members.

5.19 pm

Mr. Michael Howard (Folkestone and Hythe): For the avoidance of doubt, I draw attention to my declaration in the Register of Members' Interests.

It is no part of my attitude, unlike that of the Chancellor, to denigrate anything and everything that emanates from the other side of the House. I shall, therefore, begin by welcoming the announcement that he made on the financing of terrorism. We are at one with the Government on that issue, and we welcome the progress that has been made. Indeed, we look forward to more progress being made in that important endeavour.

This afternoon, we have once again heard a speech from the Chancellor that was a masterclass in complacency. It is the latest in a series; he made a very similar speech at the Labour party conference. Then, too, he tried to give the impression that all was for the best, in the best of all possible worlds. The moment he sat down, however, his spin doctors were scurrying around telling the world that his forecasts would not be met. Indeed, the private press briefing in advance of next week's pre-Budget report has already been going on for some time. Two weeks ago, the press were briefed that the Chancellor had told the Cabinet that he was running out of money, and no doubt his spin doctors are scurrying around briefing privately as we debate these matters in public this afternoon.

Today, the Chancellor had stern words to say about public sector pay. Yesterday, the Governor of the Bank of England warned against a high pay settlement for firefighters, saying that wage inflation would

"impact the whole of the economy",

with "not just inflation higher" but "unemployment higher", too. He said that that would be "very damaging indeed". How does the Chancellor reconcile what the Governor said yesterday with those above-inflation settlements in the public services—referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Mr. Cameron)—that have already been made? There have been increases for ACAS workers of 17 per cent. over two years, increases of 22 per cent. over three years for the staff of the Welsh Assembly and increases of 20 per cent. over four years for civilian workers in the Ministry of Defence. The Governor of the Bank of England said that

"other elements in the public sector . . . would say 'me too' and . . . that would be very difficult to stop if it were allowed to start."

As it has already started, how does the Chancellor propose to stop it?

The Chancellor also said something about the public services today; he did not say as much as he normally does, but he referred to them. Nowhere is the Government's failure more stark than in their failure to deliver on those services.

Tony Cunningham (Workington): Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman will have to wait just a minute.

In its 1997 manifesto, the Labour party said:

"The level of public spending is no longer the best measure of the effectiveness of government."

Now, all that the Government can do is to boast about the level of public spending.

Tony Cunningham *rose—*

Mr. James Plaskitt (Warwick and Leamington) *rose—*

Mr. Howard: I give way to the hon. Member for Workington (Tony Cunningham).

Tony Cunningham: At a recent press conference, the Leader of the Opposition was asked about his commitment to matching Labour's investment in health and education. He said:

"You cannot say I am committed to matching anything."

Does the shadow Chancellor agree with that view? To use the Leader of the Opposition's recent words: yes or no?

Mr. Howard: We have made this absolutely clear. I shall say it again for the hon. Gentleman and the Chancellor, and I hope that, this time, it will register with them. Our commitments on public spending will not come from the failing policies of this Government; they will come from our policies, which we believe will succeed and provide the country with the public services that it needs and deserves.

Mr. Plaskitt: In that case, will the right hon. and learned Gentleman confirm that it is still his view that public spending should fall to 35 per cent. of gross domestic product?

Mr. Howard: I have said this a hundred times before, too: no, it is not. When that statement was made, the proportion of GDP that was taken in tax in this country was 36 per cent., so that was not really as radical or dramatic a policy as the hon. Gentleman makes out. Since then, however, the burden has increased substantially, and we shall have to deal with the situation as we find it when we return to office, and not with the situation as it was in 1997.

Although, understandably, Labour Members do not want to talk about their record on public services, that is what I want to talk about now. The Chancellor's recipe for reform could be found in his public service agreements. In his first spending review, he said that they were an "essential change", helping to ensure that Government would do what they did "to the highest standard". But what has happened? The Government have failed, or are on course to fail, to meet nearly 40 per cent. of the targets that they set in 1998 and 75 per cent. of those that they set in 2000—and that is if we accept their own assessment, and their own interpretation of success or failure, at face value.

A helpful guide to the Government's interpretation can be found in today's edition of *The Times*. Under the heading "Avoid slippage by rolling forward", we read:

"New Labour target talk (a glossary of the baffling terms used by Treasury target-setters)".

We then find the following helpful guidance:

"Slippage: A target that has not been met, but might yet be

Rolled forward: Not the Lotto jackpot, but a way of keeping a target going past its sell-by date, rather than admitting it has been missed

Not met: As near as ministers come to saying 'failed' or 'broken'; this passes for strong language

Baseline not verified: Baffling term; basically means a target the terms of which are so unclear that it cannot be measured

Not yet assessed: Crops up frequently, a way of keeping a difficult target going indefinitely

Ongoing: A bit like 'rolled forward', only not so specific. Rolled forward carries a slight admission of failure; ongoing is target speak for 'we never said this would ever be finished'

On course: 'Stop asking so many awkward questions, we'll let you know when we're ready'

Measure changed: Admission that the original target has never been completely revised

Cannot assess: The Treasury's admission that a target is too baffling to make sense of

Non-smart: A target that was never meant to be assessed, has no set timetable and no set definition."

Some of the targets themselves beggar belief.

Mr. Colin Challen (Morley and Rothwell): Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman will have to listen to this first.

Some of those targets are just targets for the setting of targets. In 1998, for example, the Department of Transport was given the following target:

"Establish in 1999 new targets for reducing road casualties from road accidents in the period up to 2010."

To be fair to the Department, it met that target: it did indeed set a new target, which counts as a success. I fear, however, that the same cannot be said of the Lord Chancellor's Department. This is one of the targets set for it:

"Reduce by 2004 the time from arrest to sentence or other disposal by reducing the time from charge to disposal for all defendants with a target to be specified by . . . March 2001."

Well, March 2001 has been and gone. March 2002 has been and gone. But still no target has been specified by the Lord Chancellor's Department.

What about this target for the Department for Culture, Media and Sport?

"Facilitate and promote our competitiveness both at home and abroad of the creative industries."

That target has been declared met. We do not know how this remarkable achievement has been assessed, what benchmark was used or what the criteria were for meeting the target; what we do know is that the achievement has not been repeated in respect of either the 2000 or the 2002 set of targets. Apparently the target was met in 2000, and that is that.

Let me give one final example. This is a target set for the Treasury, by the Treasury, in 1998:

"To ensure that all departments are set efficiency targets by the end of 1998, and to work with them to ensure that they meet their targets by their deadlines."

That target, too, has not been met. Indeed, the Treasury now says that it cannot even assess it. Perhaps it should have thought of that before setting it in the first place.

David Wright (Telford): Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Howard: Yes, I will give way to the last surviving defender of the Treasury's targets.

David Wright: Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman tell us what the target for inflation was under the last Conservative Government? Was he pleased when it reached 10 per cent?

Mr. Howard: I can understand why the hon. Gentleman will go to any lengths to try to divert us from

[Mr. Howard]

his Government's failed targets, but the people of this country are more interested in the Government's failure than the paths down memory lane that he wants us to take.

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): Does my right hon. and learned Friend recall that, in 2000, the Government set a target to improve palliative care? They put £50 million behind it, but, two years on, a ministerial written answer to me given only this week says that it is disappointing that not a penny has yet been delivered to hospices to meet that target.

Mr. Howard: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for reminding me of that shameful statistic. In fact, this would all be laughable were it not so serious. Those targets are at the heart of the Government's attempts to deliver on our public services, and they are the particular brainchild of the Chancellor. They are well on the way to making him a laughing stock.

Meanwhile, the Government continue to pour money—taxpayers' money—into those unreformed public services. This Government are taking £115 billion more every year from the taxpayers of this country, which is nearly £40 a week for every man, woman and child. That is before next April's national insurance contributions rise—the Brown tax on incomes and the Brown tax on jobs. Under this Chancellor, next April's tax rises will not be the last, because the Government's failure to modernise the public services means that their only answer is higher and higher spending and higher and higher taxes. Despite that extra spending, we are not seeing the improvements in our public services that we all want.

Laura Moffatt (Crawley): My constituents are still completely confused by the right hon. and learned Gentleman's view, and it is not surprising that they say to me, as a former nurse, "All this criticism is coming at the Labour Government, who are putting so much more money into public services, but there is a given statement from the Conservatives that we would have to pay for particular services in the health service." What services are they? He needs to tell my constituents clearly what health services they would have to pay for under a Conservative Government.

Mr. Howard: I am sorry to say that confusion in the hon. Lady's constituency is obviously contagious and it is hardly surprising, given her state of mental confusion, that it has been transmitted, as she suggests, to her constituents.

The truth is that all we see under this Government is more and more money being taken out of people's pockets and the slow but inexorable undermining of the competitive advantage of British business on which everything depends. The problems in the UK economy have been building for some time. Of course it is true, as the Chancellor says, that all countries are affected by events such as 11 September, but the causes for concern in the UK economy run deeper. It is five and a half years since Labour took office, so it is time to test the Government, not merely against the much-hyped forecasts for growth and public spending this year, but against the promises and objectives that the Chancellor set out before he took office. Let us take a look at just a few of his promises.

In opposition, the Chancellor said that the test was "how you increase productivity". Britain was

"one of the poor productivity performers of Europe."

In his first pre-Budget report, he said:

"The first challenge is to increase our productivity."—[*Official Report*, 25 November 1997; Vol. 301, c. 773.]

Here we are, five years later. How has he fared on the very first challenge that he set himself? Britain's productivity growth has more than halved in that time, falling behind that of the United States. In the immortal words of the Chancellor's spin doctors, there is plenty of "increased room for catch-up".

What about the Chancellor's other promises? In opposition, he was concerned about

"the vicious cycle of poor competitiveness".

So, what has happened to competitiveness under his stewardship? On the world competitiveness scoreboard, Britain has fallen out of the top 10, slipping from ninth to 16th. There is plenty of room for catch-up there too.

In opposition, the Chancellor said that he would

"implement an industrial policy so that our manufacturing industries can grow again."

How is that industrial policy faring? Since 1997, half a million manufacturing jobs have been lost. Indeed, manufacturing jobs are being lost at the rate of 12,000 a month. Output in the manufacturing sector is lower than it was when the Government came to office.

As part of the new industrial policy, the Chancellor promised that Government must implement a co-ordinated programme of manufacturing investment. However, manufacturing investment in the last four quarters was 13 per cent. lower than in the last four quarters before Labour came to office. Business investment as a whole has fallen for six quarters in a row. We do not have to look far to see the root cause of many of those failures. For five years, the engine of wealth creation in this country has been over-taxed and almost run into the ground. It can take no more.

Rob Marris (Wolverhampton, South-West): Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Howard: The hon. Gentleman should take heed before he rises to his feet. Those are not my words: they are the words of the director general of the Confederation of British Industry. That organisation has estimated that the combined cost of the burdens on business over the past five years—taxes and red tape—could be as high as £15 billion a year.

Rob Marris: The right hon. and learned Gentleman talks about rising taxes. Does he think that that is a more undesirable way to proceed than doubling the national debt, which is what happened when he was in government?

Mr. Howard: I fear that the people of this country are much more interested in what is happening today and in the damage that the Government are doing to our economy than in the hon. Gentleman's mistaken and misleading history lesson.

In its pre-Budget report submission today, the British Chambers of Commerce talked of the

"excessive burden of taxation and regulations facing businesses".

Far from acknowledging the concerns of business, still less doing anything about them, the Government's reaction is to spend their time rubbishing them. The Chief Secretary, that renowned authority on these matters, informed the CBI that its figures on tax were "wrong and misleading". He said that Britain is doing better on tax than our competitors. That is despite the fact that Britain has overtaken Germany in the high tax league.

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry has gone one better. I am sorry not to see in her place, although she was here earlier. Not content with telling Britain's business leaders that they are wrong, she has informed them that they are incompetent too. She said:

"Too often it is poor management"

that accounts for Britain's low productivity. Apparently, she believes that the quality of management has declined in the past five years, and that that is what has gone wrong with productivity. Meanwhile, her colleague Lord Macdonald thinks that the way to increase his productivity is to write press articles defending the 4,642 new regulations brought in by the Government last year. That is a record number: one for ever 26 minutes of the working day.

I referred earlier to Labour's statement in opposition. In its business manifesto in 1997, the Chancellor said:

"We will not impose burdensome regulations on business, because we understand that successful businesses must keep costs down".

Can any promise have been broken more comprehensively than that?

Mr. Tom Harris (Glasgow, Cathcart): Will the right hon. and learned Gentleman give way?

Mr. Howard: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will answer that question.

Mr. Harris: The right hon. and learned Gentleman mentioned that business is now over-regulated. Can he name three regulations that he thinks should be removed from the shoulders of industry?

Mr. Howard: The question that the hon. Gentleman poses completely misses the point. *[Laughter.]* I shall answer his question in a moment. It is the cumulative consequence of 4,642 regulations that is so damaging. He asks for an example, and I shall give him one. I suggest that he look at new part L building regulations, statutory instrument 2002, No. 440. He may not know what that does; it forces building firms and traders to pay new charges to be allowed to install windows, conservatories, roof lights, roof windows and doors. If the installer is not registered, building regulation consent and a fee to the council is required, which costs a minimum of £150 for new windows. I suggest that the hon. Gentleman ask small builders in his constituency what they think of that regulation.

The Chancellor said two weeks ago that enterprise would be the theme of the pre-Budget report, but enterprise was supposed to be the theme last year, too. In fact, it seems to have been the theme every year but, every year, his policies damage enterprise. Only this week, a study by the London business school reported that the interest shown by would-be entrepreneurs in starting new businesses dropped by 31 per cent. last year. Strangely enough, the London business school did not blame this on the failure of managers. Paul Reynolds, its professor of entrepreneurship, said that the Government were

"failing to convince people that it is worth setting up a business and that they will not be unduly penalised if they do."

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): My right hon. and learned Friend is rightly highlighting the impact of costly and damaging regulation. However, will he confirm, for the balance of the argument and the completeness of the record, that we in the Conservative party have no intention whatever of abolishing the national minimum wage and that the logic of the existence of such a wage is that it will be periodically and affordably increased?

Mr. Howard: My hon. Friend knows that we have made it clear that we would not abolish the minimum wage, and I am happy to confirm that again this afternoon.

No one is denying that some of the decisions that the Government have taken on the economy—notably their reforms to the Bank of England—were the right ones. I have fully acknowledged that on a number of occasions. The Government inherited a golden legacy—*[Interruption.]* Labour Members who doubt that should wait for just a moment. Thankfully, unemployment, inflation and mortgage rates are still low. But, now, clouds of uncertainty are gathering and it is when times are less good that the foundations of the economy will be tested.

It was the supply-side reforms of the previous Government that led to what the Financial Secretary described, in a radio interview just a few weeks ago, as

"the good times in the late 1990s when we first came to office."

How right she was. Those "good times" did not happen by chance, but the solid foundations on which they were built are being weakened little by little with every new regulation and burden that the Government introduce; each one seemingly harmless and defensible but, cumulatively, causing untold damage. Is it any wonder that the director general of the CBI has said that we are "sleepwalking to decline"?

The Government do not want to face that reality. After more than five years in office, business is getting fed up with Labour, fed up with Labour's red tape and regulations, fed up with Labour's new business taxes and fed up with Labour's inability to improve public services such as health, transport and education that are vital to a first world economy.

Of course it was not just on business that the Chancellor made promises against which he will be judged. Five years ago, he criticised our low level of national saving and announced new measures that he said would

"encourage more people to save"—[*Official Report*, 25 November 1997; Vol. 301, c. 775.]

So what has been the result of the Chancellor's new measures? The savings ratio is forecast to fall this year to the lowest level ever recorded. Meanwhile, borrowing has risen, with household debt at record levels.

[Mr. Howard]

Far from alleviating this problem and encouraging people to save, the Chancellor has done precisely the opposite. It was the Chancellor who brought in the £5 billion a year pensions tax. So far, that has taken £25 billion from our pension funds. Some £400 is removed in tax every year from every single contributing member of a pension scheme. Another £130 is taken every year through the miserly uprating of the contracted-out rebates. When the Chancellor introduced the pensions tax in July 1997, he tried to justify it by saying that pension funds were in surplus and companies were enjoying pension holidays. In June this year, the Prime Minister defended the policy by claiming that the stock market was "up massively" on where it was five years ago. Alas, the pension funds are no longer in surplus and, unlike the American stock market, our stock market value is now lower than when the Government came to office, yet the tax continues to drain money from our pensions at the rate of £5 billion a year.

Nor have the Chancellor's other measures encouraged savings. The replacement of personal equity plans and tax-exempt special savings accounts with individual savings accounts was complicated and unnecessary. The last pensions Green Paper said that stakeholder pensions were likely to be taken up by "many people" but they have been such a dreadful flop. Help the Aged has said that pensions have faced

"a disastrous year of chaos and confusion",

with the pensions credit creating

"a new range of anomalies".

The Government still have not acted on the proposal in last year's Budget to abolish the minimum funding requirement, yet the Chancellor is having to bring in another pensions Green Paper to clear up the mess that his first Green Paper made worse. What about the effect on savings of his tax and pensions credits and the growth in means-testing, which send the message loud and clear that the more people save, the less they get? So much for the Chancellor's promises to cut means-testing.

The Chancellor also promised a transparent system. Indeed, that was the first of his five so-called "principles of fiscal management". In December 1998, Parliament approved his code for fiscal stability, which said that there would be

"transparency . . . in the publication of the public accounts".

Four years later, the Government are financing, off balance sheet, some £100 billion of public sector capital spending through the private finance initiative alone. On top of that, they are guaranteeing through letters of comfort and similar schemes some £50 billion in public-private partnership deals with London Underground, London and Continental Railways and the not-for-profit structure of Network Rail.

Those deals do not feature in the accounts at all, not even as a note in the Red Book. They would send the Chancellor's debt ratio closer to 40 per cent. than the 30 per cent. of which he frequently boasts. Indeed, if we took the PFI liabilities into account, it would be well above 40 per cent.—so much for transparency in the publication of the public accounts.

The Government have said that their treatment of those items in the national accounts conforms with all accounting rules. Perhaps they are not aware that the executives at Enron said very much the same thing. Is it any wonder that the wannabe iron Chancellor is in danger of becoming the Enron Chancellor?

Next week, the Chancellor will deliver his pre-Budget report. We look forward to hearing what he has to say about his growth forecasts and revenue forecasts but most of all we look forward to how he responds to the concerns of taxpayers and of business. Will he start to mitigate their burdens? Will he start to address the economic imbalances that his policies have exacerbated? Will he change direction on the public services or will he continue his policy of spending without reform? Will spending continue to grow faster than the economy year after year? Will taxes continue to go up and up? Will he carry on taxing and spending and failing?

Those are the questions that the Chancellor must start to answer: questions about the long-term effects of his policies, about the sustainability of his approach to taxes and spending, about the way in which we are sleepwalking to decline. After five and a half years, it is time to start judging the Chancellor and his colleagues against the promises they made. That is the basis on which we and the nation will hold them to account.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): Order. Before I call the next hon. Member to speak, I remind the House that Mr. Speaker has placed a 12-minute limit on Back-Bench speeches and that it starts now.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Can you confirm that, under the new rules that have been passed by the House, when interventions are taken not only will the clock stop, but each hon. Member will get an extra minute, up to two interventions? The rules were debated just a few weeks ago. I raise the point of order so that everyone can be assured that they are in operation today.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman is correct. For the first intervention, the clock will stop while the intervention is made and then a minute will be added to the time allowed for that speech. For the second intervention, the clock will stop again while the intervention is made and a second minute will be added to the time allowed for the speech. After those first two interventions, no allowance will be made either for the intervention or the response. I hope that that is clear and that I have not taken too long in explaining the position.

5.49 pm

Mr. John McFall (Dumbarton): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, for providing such clarity on that point.

The shadow Chancellor's speech could be described as a commitment-free zone. We are still waiting, although perhaps I should modify that a little. After the Tory conference, the entire shadow Cabinet went into a conclave. Its members emerged with one, perhaps unanimous, commitment: to attack their leader, day after day after day. I should like them to add other commitments to that one.

I congratulate my right hon. Friend the Chancellor on his speech, and on highlighting the issues in the Queen's Speech that he considers important, and with which we empathise: economic stability, high and stable growth, the delivery of good public services, the international obligations that he and the Secretary of State for International Development have set in train, and Europe. We all agree that we are operating against a dismal global background. We are witnessing the first simultaneous downturn of the global economy in 30 years. Last year, Japan's economy retrenched by 0.5 per cent., Germany is suffering the threat of deflation, and the International Monetary Fund has recently estimated eurozone growth of 1 per cent. for next year.

The background is dismal, but last year the United Kingdom enjoyed 1.9 per cent. growth—the fastest growth of any G7 country. We must celebrate and rejoice at the fact that we have the lowest inflation for 30 years, and the lowest inflation in Europe. We also have the lowest unemployment for 25 years—lower than that of Japan, the United States and the eurozone. Many Labour party members remember when we marched against unemployment more than 10 years ago, when unemployment stood at 3 million. Now, we have the lowest unemployment for decades, which is a cause for celebration.

As the Chancellor said, we have reached this point not by accident, but by design. Ten years ago, full employment was just a dream. It became an aspiration and then a commitment; now, it is almost a reality. The House need not take Labour Members' word for it. As recently as last month, the economic correspondent of *The Times*, Anatole Kaletsky, said that the British people have a level of relative prosperity higher than

"they have enjoyed since the 1940s."

He continued by stating that Britain's "economic fundamentals" are as strong

"as they have been for a century past."

There are worries, however, such as pensions, the falling stock market and pay demands. On pensions, the issue of trust is extremely important. As a result of past actions, trust has been dented. In recent months, the Treasury Committee took evidence relating to the split capital investment trust industry. As its chairman, I have received many letters from people who, on approaching their local independent financial adviser or a fund managing company, were sold zeros as part of a split level capital trust investment. Those products were advertised as being safer than a Volvo. It was said that if people put their money into such investment funds, it would sleep more soundly than a baby. Some people told us that having invested £7,000 or £8,000 to look after their elderly parents a few years down the line, their investment had reduced to less than £25. That is a scandal. It has dented people's confidence in the financial market and the stock market, and that confidence needs to be restored.

I need not say too much about Equitable Life, because we know, all too sadly, about the scandal that has affected it. Last week, with-profits annuities for pensioners were cut by almost 20 per cent. People who have saved every week of their lives, thinking that they were going to receive a pension and that they were investing in a blue chip company, have suffered a 20 per cent. cut. The Government should look urgently at that matter.

I firmly believe that the firefighters 40 per cent. pay demand is absurd and that we should refuse to entertain it, even though we should acknowledge the good work that firemen and women do. Incidentally, I should point out that women and ethnic minorities each account for only 1 per cent. of the fire service, so there is a long way to go in that regard. I am not condemning firefighters, but if we give in to the 40 per cent. demand, our current low level of debt—at 30 per cent., it is lower than that of the eurozone—will increase. If debt increases, borrowing will increase, and so will the cost of borrowing. As a result, public investment will decrease, the good investment in public services will be no more, and we will end up with a black hole. Money will go into a pit, and nothing will come out at the other end. Investment, standards and wages will suffer. It is for that reason that such demands must be resisted.

Mr. Simon Thomas (Ceredigion): There is a lack of women recruits to the fire service. The hon. Gentleman says that a 40 per cent. target is not feasible, yet a lot of women must be put off by the fact that so many firefighters do two jobs to pay their mortgage. Surely it would be better to reach a settlement, no matter what it costs, to achieve a modernised fire service that can attract women.

Mr. McFall: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman has been speaking to the Deputy Prime Minister, because the issue is indeed modernisation and ensuring that we get a change in practices. Negotiating the issue of modernisation might result in a better service, so I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention.

On the spending levels to which the Chancellor has committed himself, I note with interest that spending for September 2002 has risen by almost 14 per cent.—a move that I support. Such an increase is encouraging, as is the knowledge that the goal of quality public services is being delivered.

I agree entirely with the Chancellor that we should encourage enterprise, particularly in the disadvantaged areas that a number of Members represent. For every three jobs created in the best areas, only one is created in poorer areas. That results in reduced income for services in the poorer areas, reduced quality of life, and increased poverty. The best anti-poverty programme is to assist people in poorer areas in starting up their own businesses, but at the same time we must ensure that they have access to capital, advice and skills.

On the Chancellor's international obligations, one big issue is economic reform in Europe, which has not been delivered. The hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) mentioned structural reform in Germany, and I agree with him. The problem with Germany—and with several other countries—is that it has not reformed structurally. The Treasury Committee visited Frankfurt last week—we also visited Paris—and it became obvious to us that the German economy needs a great deal of restructuring. That problem has yet to be tackled.

Chris Grayling: Does the hon. Gentleman believe that Germany has a further long-term problem, in that—as

[Chris Grayling]

many economists now argue—it joined the euro at the wrong exchange rate? Of course, there is no way out of that.

Mr. McFall: I agree. Sotto voce, several German politicians told us that German interest rates ought to be lower.

The big issue in Europe is the common agricultural policy, which is in urgent need of reform. A typical family of four now pays £16 a week in taxes for higher food prices, when food prices should be lower. They are propping up a regime that has as its centrepiece overproduction and environmental degradation. That conflicts with the Chancellor's wider aim on the international stage of helping developing countries. The CAP undermines the livelihoods of millions of farmers in developing countries by dumping cheap food on those countries, while denying them export opportunities to the single largest market in the world. Developing countries are getting fed up with western countries saying, "You liberalise while we subsidise." That has to change.

Despite World Trade Organisation commitments, agricultural support from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development has risen from $300 billion to $330 billion in the past decade. That is five times the global aid budget, so the Chancellor's worthy aims, aspirations and actions on behalf of developing countries are being undercut.

Three quarters of the world's 1.2 billion extremely poor people live and work in rural areas. The average for developing countries is 50 per cent. of the work force in agriculture, and in some countries it is as high as 80 per cent. Women are particularly affected. Anyone who has been to developing countries knows the crucial role that women play not only in keeping families and society together but in the economic field. Agriculture plays a crucial part in reducing poverty, and I would like the Chancellor and others to put it high on their agenda.

We know that the WTO met at Doha last week. We should all bear it in mind that if all the trade barriers were cut by half, the world's income would rise by $400 billion, which is equivalent to adding an economy the size of Australia's to the global economy. It would liberalise and bring prosperity to people who are living in abject poverty. Quality of life would improve, and so would international stability. We cannot get away with a world in which we increasingly gather material resources to ourselves and deny them to the vast majority of the world population. Disorder and anarchy will surely flow from that. Our economic and our social objectives must be at one. I urge the Government to work towards both sets of objectives, to make this not only a more prosperous but a more peaceful world.

6.1 pm

Matthew Taylor (Truro and St. Austell): The Chancellor spent a lot of time on the Conservative Government's record, and the Conservative shadow Chancellor spent no time at all on what a future, hypothetical Conservative Government might do. The Government's approach to the economy in the Queen's Speech was notable as much for what it did not say as for what it did. We heard about sound public finances, high levels of employment, economic stability, investment, and reform in public services—nothing new or objectionable in those aims. The Queen's Speech said that the Government would not renege on the commitment to assess the five tests on the euro by June 2003, but of course gave away nothing new.

More significant was what it did not mention. There was no mention of investment, which is down 10 per cent. on the year and has fallen faster over the past year and a half than that in the United States of America, France, Japan or Italy—yes, faster even than in the sluggish, depressed economy of Japan.

There was no mention of the longest manufacturing recession since the second world war, the deepest recession since 1981 and the loss of 500,000 manufacturing jobs since Labour took office. There was no mention of the problems in tourism, with visitors down 2.5 million on the 2000 level. There was no mention of lower productivity growth in this cycle than in previous cycles. Output per job has increased at an average annual rate of 1.4 per cent. since the mid-1990s, and output per person by just 1.2 per cent., compared with average productivity growth of just over 2 per cent. since the 1960s. Let us not forget that the Chancellor used to say that productivity is his first test.

There was no mention of the fact that growth is sustained by an unsustainable consumption boom while manufacturing withers. Between 1995 and 2002, the economy expanded by 20 per cent. and services by 28 per cent., but manufacturing fell by 1 per cent. Returns in manufacturing are now down to only 4 per cent. compared with 14.1 per cent. in services. In the same period, consumption grew by 4.2 per cent. per annum, while gross domestic product—the wider economy—grew by only 2.6 per cent. Consumption has consistently been rising 1.5 per cent. faster than growth. How long does the Chancellor believe that that is sustainable? How much personal debt can people build before it all goes bust?

We intend to say what we think the Government's fiscal and monetary stance should be, even though—perhaps unsurprisingly, a week before the pre-Budget report—the Chancellor did not give much away. The Conservative shadow Chancellor had nothing at all to say on the subject, which is rather more surprising from someone who supposedly offers an alternative to the Government position. Despite the speculation, we do not believe that, with an economy facing the current risks, with the record that I have spelled out, this would be an appropriate moment, economically or in any other respect, to have further tax rises or cuts in spending.

Indeed, the present spending plan, before the Chancellor had any idea of the economic situation that would unfold, has fortuitously proved to be the best timed piece of counter-cyclical spending that any Government have introduced. It always used to be said that Governments never step on the accelerator at the

right time, but this time, arguably, the Chancellor has, although even he would not claim to have foreseen the problems coming down the track.

Chris Grayling: The hon. Gentleman said that his party does not believe that there should be any further tax increases. What, then, is the status of its spending commitments made in recent years, and most notably the intention to abolish tuition fees? Does that commitment remain, and if so, how will it be financed?

Matthew Taylor: As the hon. Gentleman knows, the Chancellor has announced substantial extra spending on both education and health—more than enough to fund the programme for which we argued. As yet, the Government have not told us how they will allocate that spending. We will press them to abolish tuition fees. We await delayed announcements early in the new year. We would not now need to argue for the penny on income tax for education for which we argued in the past because the money is there, but if the Government mis-spend the money, as they may well do, we will be honest enough to say, in the approach to the election, whether a tax rise may be necessary. Certainly, that would not be right for the economy now, and we have spelled that out.

Perhaps the hon. Gentleman can clarify the position of Conservative Front Benchers, who have said that they do not believe in the extra spending for the health service and have voted against it, while announcing a series of spending policies to give tax breaks to those who already have private health insurance. Perhaps he will explain how they intend to pay for that—although if he did he would get into trouble with the shadow Chancellor, who assiduously avoids giving any clue to his tax or spending plans.

Mr. Martin O'Neill (Ochil): Will the hon. Gentleman take me back two steps? As I understand it, he told the House that there is sufficient money in the notional budget afforded to education by the Chancellor to pay for tuition fees. If that is the case, surely it must be at the expense of something else in the education budget—or has the Chancellor, with his characteristic generosity, afforded even more largesse than we had anticipated?

Matthew Taylor: When the Chancellor tells us how the money is to be spent, I will be able to answer that question, but as any answers on higher education have been delayed until at least the new year—they are now two years overdue—we are no more able than the hon. Gentleman is to second-guess how the Government intend to spend that money.

While the Conservative shadow Chancellor has been reticent about Conservative plans for the economy, his party leader has been somewhat more forthcoming. In a recent speech to the Institute of Directors, he backed our view that this was a moment for neither tax increases nor spending cuts. We agree that it is perfectly reasonable for the Chancellor to plan his spending on the long-term growth potential of the economy, not on fluctuations around the trend.

In that respect, it is the Conservatives who are in a complete muddle. Do they want to spend less, or more, or the same? Do they want to tax less, or more, or the same? Some Conservatives want to tax and spend more. The hon. Member for Tunbridge Wells (Mr. Norman) said just last week that

> "Investment in those services, if it comes at the expense of temporarily raising taxation, can be a good deal."

Chris Grayling: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Matthew Taylor: I will in a moment, because the hon. Gentleman might want to add to the range of views expressed, or at least align himself with one of them.

Some Conservatives want to spend less—perhaps that is the hon. Gentleman's view. We were told by the Conservative shadow Chancellor, speaking not so long ago:

> "the lower we can get public spending as a proportion of GDP, the better"

Although the right hon. and learned Gentleman says that this might not be the moment to do so—he will not say whether it is or not—presumably he believes that at some point it will be desirable to cut spending. Some Conservatives want to tax and spend the same. Their health spokesman, the hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox), told the BBC earlier this year that he conceded that

> "Taxes may have to rise"

to pay for improvements to the NHS. However, he subsequently voted against tax increases.

The Conservative leader described the Chancellor's penny national insurance increase as a tax on jobs, which contradicts what he told BBC Online on 19 April and shows that the right hon. Gentleman has more than one policy of his own. In addition, those competing to lead the Conservatives all offer different interpretations. The Conservatives voted against the tax increase, which comes as no surprise, given that tonight we have already heard Conservative Back Benchers calling for across-the-board tax cuts. Perhaps the hon. Member for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) would like to tell us with which faction of the Conservative party and which leader he aligns himself.

Chris Grayling: I am intrigued by the hon. Gentleman's use of the word "muddle", because he has just told the House that as of today he does not believe in a tax increase or a tax cut, but he may well change his mind before the next election. In my view, that constitutes a muddle.

Matthew Taylor: What I said was perfectly coherent. I said that given the state of the economy, the Government do not have to either raise taxes or cut spending; it would be inappropriate to do so and it would worsen the risk of recession. Conservative Front Benchers have failed to give any indication of whether they believe that that is true, or whether they want to cut spending or increase taxes. Because they have no policy that they are prepared to make public, the shadow Chancellor instead read out a long section from *The Times* today—presumably that is a replacement for a policy position of his own. However, he should be wary of reading from *The Times* because it has a lot to say about the Conservative party. I will not read out the full-

[Matthew Taylor]

text, but less than two weeks ago, under the headline "Stop digging", *The Times* editorial said about his leader's comments:

> "Rarely can a political boast have seemed so shallow . . . counter-productive and embarrassing as a firework that misfires and goes swirling off into the crowd."

That is not a bad summary of the Conservative party's current position.

We are concerned about the long-term strategy being followed by the Chancellor. In the last Budget and the comprehensive spending review, he built his whole programme around his belief that there would be an increase in long-term growth from 2.5 per cent. to 2.75 per cent. We now know that that was optimistic. It is one thing to even out fluctuations in the economy over time in one's spending plans, but it is quite another to assume that long-term growth will continue to be strong when one's policies are consistently weakening it and one has thrown prudence to the wind in one's assumptions about increased growth.

To be fair to the Chancellor, he built his spending projections around a figure of 2.5 per cent. growth, not the 2.75 per cent. that he thought the economy would deliver. He called the difference the margin of prudence—the margin for error. However, the Government's own figures reveal that that margin has entirely evaporated. The Chancellor increased his growth forecast on the basis of population growth, yet the Government Actuary's latest estimate of the British population is 1.2 million less than the Treasury figure, and the Government Actuary says that the population is growing by 65,000 fewer people a year than the Treasury assumes in its fiscal projections. At the end of the current spending period, that difference will account for a loss of income for the Chancellor of some £5 billion a year.

Worse still, the Chancellor appears to have known that by using those figures, he was flattering himself. On the very day that he published the assumption of increased population growth, he published in the Wanless report on the national health service another assumption of population growth that was some 1 million lower. That figure, too, flattered the right hon. Gentleman, because a lower population reduces the amount he has to spend on the national health service, whereas the figure used for the wider economy flattered him by suggesting that growth and therefore Government income would be higher.

The latest Government Actuary's Department figures suggest that matters will worsen for the Treasury, because they predict that there will be more than 2 million fewer people by 2020. No wonder that those figures—unlike most Government assumptions of that sort—were never put to the National Audit Office for its comments. The Treasury's increased growth estimate increases tax revenues by £1 billion in the first year, rising to £5 billion in 2006–07. There has therefore been a significant loss of the room for error that the Chancellor had built into his projections. I hope that he will put that right in the pre-Budget report. My argument is based entirely on the Government's own figures and the assumptions that he used in the detail underlying his last Budget. The National Audit Office was not asked to audit the revised estimate of growth. It noted that although the new estimate was

> "reasonable . . . it would be less cautious than the previous assumption."

That was before the latest figures were produced by the Government Actuary.

That leaves us the entirety of the Government's spending plans balanced on a tightrope—the assumption of 2.5 per cent. growth. That brings me to the underlying structural problems that raise serious questions about the Government's ability to deliver their plans—*[Interruption.]* That is one Back Bencher who might also have difficulty delivering.

The underlying structural problem in the economy is the over-valuation of the pound driving a booming consumer sector and a depressed tradeables sector. Services growth is at more than 2 per cent., whereas manufacturing is suffering the deepest recession since 1981. The trade deficit was almost £40 billion last year, and it is on course to be £35 billion this year. Demand is driven by Government spending and consumers while exports fall and investment slumps. Investment accounts for a lower proportion of national income than it has done for five years, manufacturing profitability stands at less than half that of services, and services price inflation is 6 per cent. higher than goods price inflation.

Those are fundamental imbalances in the economy. I believe that the Chancellor knows that, but he has failed to come to grips with them. He talks about increasing productivity, but productivity growth has been lower than in the past. He talks about increasing investment, but investment is slumping. He talks about our success compared with other economies, but the truth is that success in the British economy is now built almost entirely on a consumption boom and increasing levels of consumer debt, house prices and house equity withdrawal. The Governor of the Bank of England, the Monetary Policy Committee and all serious commentators know and have argued that that is unsustainable. Unless the Chancellor can pull a rabbit out of the hat and turn manufacturing around, he faces a long-term problem with his spending and tax plans, not the short-term problem with which we are all familiar.

Mr. Kelvin Hopkins (Luton, North): The hon. Gentleman suggests that all our problems—if problems there are—arise from the strength of the pound. Is he suggesting that we intervene actively in the currency markets to bring down the value of the pound?

Matthew Taylor: I do not believe that all the problems are the result of the pound's value, and I shall talk later about some of the other issues. Clearly, there is no agreement in the House on what I regard as the best solution, which is entry into the euro at a sustainable rate. The Chancellor has not yet told us his view on that.

The other issues about which I shall speak include the red tape, tax complication and bureaucracy that have been the Chancellor's hallmark. He prides himself on

being a micro-interventionist and believes that the Treasury's role is to try, through micro-management, to affect business investment decisions. The figures that I have given the House show that all of that has proved to be wholly counterproductive.

Mr. Mark Hendrick (Preston): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Matthew Taylor: I shall give way in a moment.

We must remember that Britain's record of investment is astoundingly bad. The Bank of England recently noted that the fall in investment in the last two years is comparable with those in the recessions of the early 1980s and 1990s and worse than those in the supposedly worse economies of the USA, France, Japan and Italy. If this is not, therefore, a reflection of what is happening globally, it must be a reflection of what is happening in 11 Downing street.

The figures for foreign direct investment seem to confirm that. Foreign direct investment into the eurozone increased by 383 per cent. in the first two years of the euro, compared with an increase of 12 per cent. for the non-eurozone countries. A report by Ernst and Young showed that, in 2001, Britain attracted 21 per cent. of new European investment projects. We are still leading in the EU, but that lead is falling, as is the proportion of projects, down from 28 per cent. in 1998 and 26 per cent. in 2000. Again, the fall in investment does not reflect what is going wrong in the wider economy; something is going wrong here in Britain, and that is down to the Chancellor, whose policies are not delivering.

Mr. Hendrick: I thank the hon. Gentleman for finally giving way. He says that his party would not alter the Government's spending plans—it would spend no more and no less—but asserts that growth projections are over-ambitious and that the figure should be, say, 2 per cent. Would his party still stick to the spending commitments and run up a deficit, or would it make a cut, and if so, what cuts would it make?

Matthew Taylor: That is a perfectly reasonable question, and the answer is equally reasonable. In the short run, the Chancellor does not have the problem that some are suggesting. The simplistic view is that one runs up a deficit because economic times are bad, so one should cut spending or raise taxes. That would worsen, rather than improve, the situation. However, there is a long-term problem, and I shall propose changes that the Chancellor should make that would allow him to deliver his planned spending increases. To be fair, the right hon. Gentleman has recognised over and over that no Chancellor in the world, if he does not get the economy right, can afford the spending that we all believe—at least the Liberal Democrats and the Labour party believe; I am not sure that the Conservatives do—is necessary to deliver the public service improvements for which we have argued.

We welcome the fact that the Government are now making real spending increases, financed by tax increases, broadly similar to those for which we have argued. That should have been done earlier, but we will not now dispute it or shy away from it. However, long-term problems need to be tackled, and the reason they are not being tackled is a flaw in the Chancellor's view of how the economy should be managed. He desires to control, to meddle and to micro-manage, and that has not delivered, and will not deliver, the necessary improvements.

A Government obsessed with central control create bureaucracy and red tape for business as much as for the public sector. That process can be reversed, but that is not the Chancellor's solution. When his targets are missed and his controls fail, he adds further levels of bureaucracy to both the public sector and the private sector. He then finds that they are still not delivering, so he thinks that the process of control is not working and adds yet another tier. That is why there is a list of failures for the Government's targets, such as the ones that are not met or are rolled over. The process is flawed. Labour Members do not have far to go to find support for my view. They can ask the other Cabinet members, who are subject to those controls. The Chancellor's flawed personality seeks to control everything from a spider's web at 11 Downing street.

We need a simpler tax system. The Chancellor has to stop being a micro-meddler. The extraordinary thing about the extra layers of tax, which have increased the size of "Tolleys", the tax guide bible, by almost a third in the short time that the Government have been in office, is that the Treasury has admitted that it is not even checking whether most of the changes are having any effect. There is no process for analysing any of that complication to find out whether it is helping. The truth is that it is a total waste of money, and we can see that by the economic failure that I have described.

We need to cut red tape on business. We have published a long list of changes that could be made. It is time that the Chancellor recognised that one can load only so much red tape on to business before there is an inevitable cost in investment because companies will go to other countries where it is easier to operate.

We need to sort out the public transport system. I hardly need say more about that because hon. Members are among the biggest users of a system that is failing.

Finally, I turn to the euro. There is not agreement in the House on that and there is not agreement in the country, but our view has been consistent and clear—

Mr. Bercow: And wrong.

Matthew Taylor: The hon. Gentleman says that, but one of his colleagues does not agree at all. That is another example of the Conservative party trying to appeal to everyone by having every possible view on every subject. *[Interruption.]* Hon. Members may criticise the Liberal Democrats for putting our necks on the line and for consistently arguing the case for the euro, but it is perfectly apparent that the Conservative party has no consistency on the issue whatever.

The Conservatives offer no explanation that makes any sense of the present problems in manufacturing. Only a few years ago, they welcomed a fall in the exchange rate as rescuing British industry—some of them even called it White Wednesday. However, in recent years exchange rates have been substantially higher than the level from which we previously fell,

[Matthew Taylor]

and a similar deep recession in manufacturing has resulted. Each of the deep recessions in the early '80s, the late '80s and the early '90s has been associated with massive over-valuation of sterling based not on the realities of the economy but on speculators seeking to make a fast buck and, in the process, destroying jobs and industry. If the Conservative party has a solution that is an alternative to the euro, it has yet to tell us what it is.

Mrs. Browning: Following the hon. Gentleman's teasing of the Conservative parliamentary party for its views on the euro, will he clarify whether the Liberal Democrats' position is that, come a referendum, all his parliamentary colleagues will be expected to campaign for a yes vote?

Matthew Taylor: Unlike that of the hon. Lady's party, our Front-Bench team will certainly campaign on a consistent basis. We will have to see about the rest of the party when the time comes.

Mr. McFall: Will the hon. Gentleman clarify whether, in his opinion and that of his party, the five tests set down by the Chancellor in October 1997 have been passed?

Matthew Taylor: I hope that the hon. Gentleman's Select Committee will conduct an inquiry to tell us the answer to that question before, rather than after, the event. That would be helpful.

We have published a report to which we invited a wide range of senior economists to contribute, and they advised us that the five tests have either been met or are in the process of being met, and we believe that that is correct. However, one serious issue would have to be dealt with as part of the process of joining the euro—the exchange rate itself. We need confirmation from the Government that that test will be passed. It would be helpful if the Chancellor clarified what he believes a sustainable long-term exchange rate is. It is notable that every time that he has talked about euro entry, and noises are made, there has been a fall in the value of the pound. The markets believe that it is over-valued in the long term, but they constantly speculate about the short term and are making a fast buck. They do not care much about manufacturing in the United Kingdom or elsewhere suffering the costs.

Mr. Hopkins: To return to the eurozone, is it not in serious trouble, teetering on the brink of recession? Joining the euro at anything like the present parity—and even with a substantial devaluation—would still drag us into a zone facing long-term recession.

Matthew Taylor: People must bear in mind the fact that, since the creation of the euro, the average growth of the eurozone has been faster than growth in this country. Employment in manufacturing in the eurozone has increased when such jobs have plummeted by 500,000 in this country. In testing whether the British economy is genuinely performing much better than the rest of Europe, the hon. Gentleman must consider my points about the two-speed economy and whether our economic success in personal income and employment is built on long-term structural achievement or short-term debt explosion—the boom in consumer spending and house prices. If it is the latter, we have no reason to congratulate ourselves because growth is not sustainable in the long term. I believe that we would be better joining the euro, although we must do so at a competitive exchange rate. Frankly, that is more likely while eurozone countries continue to make it clear that they would like Britain to join early than if we join some years down the line when things have settled for them, but are less settled for us. Our past experience in agricultural and fisheries policy is pertinent in that respect.

Rob Marris *rose—*

Matthew Taylor: I have spoken for a long time and have given way many times. I therefore hope that the hon. Gentleman will understand if I do not give way, as I do not want to detain the House.

I shall touch briefly on issues that affect the delivery of Government spending improvements. I have talked a lot about the economic background, but to be successful, it is necessary not just to have an economy that is functioning well but to spend that investment well. I shall sound two notes of caution. First, we agree with the Chancellor and the Government's stance—we cannot allow extra spending to be grabbed by large pay claims rippling through the public sector. We are sympathetic to much of what the firemen say about the lack of change over the years and the fact that there has been no proper review for a generation; nevertheless, a 40 per cent. pay claim was never realistic, and we are glad that the Fire Brigades Union appears to be changing a position that was never deliverable.

Investment cannot be spent on across-the-board pay increases, but in our last manifesto we identified areas of the public sector with a specific need for substantial increases—above all, areas where it is no longer possible to recruit or retain staff in sufficient numbers. If there were ever a sign that pay and conditions are not appropriate, it must be not being able to recruit or retain. That covers trainee teachers, for example, and certain grades of staff in the NHS and other sectors. Leaving things as they are is no more a solution than allowing general wage inflation to take a grip, as it wastes the opportunity for public service improvements.

Secondly, on central control, it is not right for the Chancellor or the Secretary of State for Health to describe as decentralisation and letting go the creation of foundation hospitals that are limited to certain communities and built, not according to local discretion but to whether local managers have followed to the letter and met centrally set targets, irrespective of their application to the locality. That creates not just further centralisation but the great unfairness that some people benefit from health service improvements purely because management have toed the Chancellor's line, following instructions to the last dot and comma.

Other communities, by contrast, will not get investment in their hospital because they have broken a tiny bureaucratic rule or Government target, often for reasons that have nothing to do with local management. In my area, for example, the hospital was downgraded

for one reason alone—debt—as the Government pay for out-of-county treatment of tourists two years in arrears. In the future envisaged by the Chancellor, that would cost the Cornish community millions of pounds of investment in their local hospital, which cannot be right.

The Chancellor must therefore let go. He must simplify and stop micro-managing or we will not achieve improvements. Services cannot deliver improvements if they do not give doctors, nurses, teachers and police officers the discretion to do their front-line jobs properly or if the build-up of long-term economic problems is allowed to overwhelm and eventually destroy the effort to make badly needed investment.

6.36 pm

Mr. Martin O'Neill (Ochil): Having had to listen to the last two speeches from Front-Bench spokesmen, I now understand what shadow-boxing involves—it certainly does not involve laying a glove on the Chancellor but on one another.

I welcomed the Chancellor's speech but, to be a bit churlish, I would have preferred him to make the autumn statement first. We are in something of a fiscal vacuum—the likely output and revenue figures as adjusted by the Treasury are central to several issues thrown up by his address, and it would have been helpful to have a more realistic framework. I am glad that the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry is in the Chamber, as the fiscal vacuum is not necessarily matched by a policy vacuum in her work for manufacturing industry. That is welcome—for a period after 1997 her Department was infatuated with issues involving information technology and so on, and did not focus clearly, effectively and consistently on other areas in the manufacturing economy which, it is only fair to acknowledge, it engaged with following difficulties in the car industry. Now, however, it has a more coherent policy. I am not sure whether the seven pillars will be the seven pillars of wisdom, but one—macro-economic stability—has been discussed today.

On macro-economic stability and the firefighters' dispute, in the 1970s I went on strike as a teacher to get a rise. We were lucky as, for about 18 months, we benefited from the Houghton award, getting about 23 per cent. to catch up with what had escaped our grasp in the early 1970s. Within 18 months of our receiving that award, however, inflation was even higher and interest rates were so high that the mortgage payments that my wife and I had to make made the increase virtually worthless. We cannot afford to go back to those levels. If we are going to achieve a settlement in the present dispute, it must be sustainable. We cannot afford to open the floodgates for deals that would destroy or certainly seriously jeopardise this Government's greatest single achievement: economic stability.

Although controlling inflation and keeping down interest rates are important, investing in our manufacturing base is a prerequisite to the survival of the sector. Our dependence on financial services has allegedly become greater—it is a matter of a couple of per cent.—but striving for manufacturing efficiencies will more than anything else impose self-discipline in the economy and be the most effective means of securing long-term economic prosperity.

I do not want to downgrade the financial services industry, but such services will be in decline for some period. There will be difficulties; we have not yet seen the level of lay-offs experienced in the United States. My point is completely independent of the issue of Enron. I refer to the fact that financial services are going through a period of difficulty, and that will be reflected in unfortunate but probably necessary savings, meaning redundancies and lay-offs.

If we want to sustain economic growth in this country, we need not just long-term but short-term improvements in manufacturing. It is highly appropriate that not only are the Treasury and the Department of Trade and Industry working together, but that there is a cross-departmental initiative which will involve investment in skills and people through various training on the shopfloor and of management, as my right hon. Friend the Chancellor has identified.

If we can start to equal the commitment to improvement in skills with that to improvement in equipment, we can go some way to sustaining such growth. Low interest rates ought to be an incentive to businesses to borrow to invest, but sadly, as has been said across the House, we are not investing. These facts do not bear disputation. France, Germany and Italy, with which we must compete and catch up, are still committing more to investment than us. Part of our problem is that, because our currency is over-valued, we are seeking to depress price by using profits to assist in keeping down costs rather than for funding investment in the way that we want.

I hope that the Chancellor will begin to look again at support for investment and at providing investment incentives. If it is good enough to invest in research and development, surely it is good enough to invest imaginatively. I use the word "imaginatively" because there is a Treasury mantra—perhaps in the case of the Chancellor a "metrical sang" that is repeated time after time—that if we give money to potential investors, we are really giving it only to those who would have invested anyway.

Last year, when I thought that investment levels were going to be very low, I was worried that the Treasury might slip in an investment-incentive stream that nobody would take up, and to which they would then point cynically, saying, "We tried it. We told you so; it is not having any impact." We should persist in trying to find ways of getting investment into industry because across the political divide we have not been successful in doing so over the years.

There are those who argue that if prices are too high on the international markets, it is because we are not in the eurozone. Even though there is an over-valued pound and an under-valued euro, the last thing that we require at the moment is a sterling devaluation. The Liberals can use all the euphemisms they like, but at the end of the day, if there is to be a currency adjustment and it does not quite work perfectly—I broadly subscribe to the idea that if we talk seriously about joining the euro, the pound will fall and the euro will rise—there will be a gap. That gap will have to be bridged by a package of deflationary, monetary and fiscal measures.

It would be wholly irresponsible given the fragility of the international economy for us to jeopardise the macro-economic stability that we are enjoying by

[Mr. Martin O'Neill]

prematurely entering the eurozone. Therefore, although I would like us to join the euro, we must remember that other parts of the world are in many respects unaffected by it. I think of North America, of the fact that China has just joined the World Trade Organisation and of the market possibilities in areas where the United Kingdom can provide goods and services as efficiently and effectively as anybody else. We should not forget the role of exports and trade. The work that has been done in the promotion of Trade Partners UK and the like has gone a long way to helping that matter.

There is a somewhat convoluted reference in the Queen's Speech to draft legislation on a nuclear liabilities authority. That will be an important piece of legislation not least because of the problems confronting British Energy. I am aware that there are some who use the problems of British Energy as an excuse to denigrate the whole nuclear industry. I cannot see the UK meeting its international commitments on carbon emissions, whether those made in Kyoto or anywhere else, without investing in the nuclear industry.

The significance of a liabilities management authority—LMA—is that it would assume responsibility for the historical cost component in the nuclear power equation. That would enable a proper debate on the cost of the next set of nuclear reactors. We must take account of that. I only hope that the Government will be able to move quickly not just on LMA but on steps towards a new system of electricity trading arrangements that will encompass the whole UK.

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. O'Neill: No, I have only one minute left.

Mr. Blunt: The hon. Gentleman will be given extra time.

Mr. O'Neill: In that case, I give way.

Mr. Blunt: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will make it clear in his extra minute that, like us, he regrets the absence of proposed legislation not only on LMA but on British electricity trading and transmission arrangements.

Mr. O'Neill: I do not think that LMA is an issue of contention. If a draft Bill is published in the next few months, I would imagine that the fact that it was mentioned in the Queen's Speech will allow it to be dealt with as carry-over legislation, and we would still be able to enact the legislation in a reasonable time. BETTA is a different issue. Legislation will be required, but I suspect that between now and next October there will have to be arm-wrestling and complex negotiation. It is important that we get things right this time. The new electricity trading arrangements—NETA—did not take account of the need for additional capacity and did not reward it. They also did not take account of the need for appropriate investment. Those matters must be incorporated in any draft of BETTA before we can talk blithely about legislation.

I want finally to address the options facing British manufacturing. We must ensure lean production. We need better investment behind our people and assured levels of charges for energy and the like so that our industries—manufacturing in particular—know where they are going. The Government's Queen's Speech offers several indications of the direction that we are taking, and they are a realistic basis on which manufacturing in Britain can hope to progress in the very difficult times over the next 12 months. I therefore welcome the Queen's Speech.

6.49 pm

Mr. Kenneth Clarke (Rushcliffe): I refer the House to my business interests, as registered in the Register of Members' Interests.

The Chancellor of the Exchequer is skating on thin ice when he gives such a rosy view of the outlook for the British economy. He displays his usual fiery rhetoric in the House and exudes glowing optimism—both qualities that are not altogether suitable when one is skating on thin ice. I am worried, because I believe that in this Session of Parliament, it is possible that the Chancellor will face some of the toughest and most difficult decisions that he has faced so far during his tenure in the Treasury—thanks, I might say, to the inheritance that he had, and also to the way in which our economy was sustained in the wake of the American-led boom, before it went bust, for the most of the first Parliament of his period of office.

The Chancellor gave his usual robust performance to the House, but such a complacent description of our economic outlook ought to be worrying. I can only hope that he did not believe a great deal of it himself, and I trust that he had his fingers crossed behind his back when he gave us some of those descriptions of where he thought we were going. He tried to exchange with me some arguments about our past forecasts. I do not have a great regard for other people's forecasts. I do not want to go back into history defending all mine, and the Chancellor certainly could not defend all his, but I think that more of mine were right than he claims.

The forecasts most relevant to today's debate, as has already been said, are the forecasts of growth that the Chancellor of the Exchequer was giving to the House only six months ago. I took part in the Budget debate, as did most of the hon. Members who have spoken so far. I tried hard to mock the forecasts for growth that the Chancellor was then giving, in order to explain the sustainability of the plans that he was setting out. The mockery was justified. Those forecasts for growth are already wrong. The whole world knows from repeated briefing that they are already wrong. Presumably, we will be told officially next week, when we have the November statement, but I would guess that growth this year is 1.5 per cent. The hon. Member for Truro and St. Austell (Matthew Taylor) set out at some little length the reasons for casting doubt on the underlying estimates for growth upon which the next several years' spending plans were based.

One thing on which we are all agreed—I think the Chancellor joins in this—is that the politics of so-called tax and spend will become increasingly relevant as this Parliament goes on. They are an important matter for us to discuss. I object yet again to the way in which

the Government, including the Chancellor of the Exchequer, try to cheapen the debate by claiming that if one raises doubts about the sustainability of their Harold Wilson-type programmes, one is somehow committing oneself to extraordinary figures for cuts in health and education. What they are committing themselves to is several years of growth in the totality of public spending. The explanations that they have given about how that is to be financed are unsatisfactory. We, as Parliament, are entitled to discuss that in terms of the prospects for future taxation and to discuss the impact on the real economy, which is where I part company with the Chancellor.

The British economy has had more than 10 years of growth with low inflation—the longest period that we have had in living memory. At present, that record is looking more sickly than it has for a long time, as I said. We are of course maintaining 1.5 per cent. growth. That is quite good. We have been growing at less than the average for most of the past four or five years among the G7 nations. Currently, we are just ahead of all the economies, although we have slowed down.

The problem is that the present growth of the British economy in 2002 depends fundamentally on two things, as far as I can see. One is a housing boom of an extremely worrying kind, with massive withdrawals of equity taking place and being turned into spending. The second thing sustaining our present sickly level of growth, which is well below trend, is a very high level of consumer spending, based on rapid growth in public sector spending and public sector pay. Both those, in my opinion, are extremely worrying. We should not expect to sustain a healthy level of economic growth on those two bases for very much longer.

First, on the housing boom, which I am sure we will discuss at greater length before this Parliament is out, house prices have gone up 30 per cent. over the past 12 months. I hate to say it, but I do not think that that is sustainable. There will be a correction. I hear all the arguments. They were not given today—the Chancellor did not get round to it—about why it is all right, it is different this time and we should not be worried about it. Those are pretty good arguments. I used many of them myself in some Cabinet office or other in the late 1980s. I have learned from experience on that front. One cannot have such rapid growth in house prices without there being a correction, and in a period of low inflation that will hit people hard. I hope that it does not, but negative equity may come back to trouble us before long.

Retail sales, as I said, are very healthy. In October they were up by 7.1 per cent. compared with a year earlier. That is all kept going by some public sector pay increases, and also by an extraordinary level of household debt. As a percentage of our gross domestic product, household debt is now 109 per cent. In France, for example, a healthy economy that until recently has been doing better than ours, it is only 46 per cent. of GDP. Household savings in this country have dropped as a proportion of GDP to 4.5 per cent. in the second quarter of this year. The savings ratio in France is 15 per cent.

The significance of that is that if we want stability—the Chancellor always goes on about stability—we need a higher level of personal savings and a lower level of household debt. It is all going in the wrong direction. The Chancellor is doing nothing about it, but claiming credit for the fact that we are still growing a little faster than other troubled economies in the G7.

What is going wrong? I shall not repeat what has already been said. It is extremely important to notice that business investment is down 10 per cent. compared with a year ago. Investment in business in this country has fallen to 12 per cent. of GDP, a record low. Again, I will go back to the past. I can remember how, in opposition, the present Chancellor used to go on about our investment performance. It has deteriorated throughout his time in office. He spoke about employment and completely misanswered a question. Private sector employment in the third quarter of 2002 dropped by 36,000, but full-time jobs went down by 72,000. My hon. Friend the Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Djanogly) was right to say that it is public sector employment that is the only thing continuing to grow.

We have a dismal record of investment. What is the significance of that? Looking forward in the medium term, if we do not get business investment, the result is low productivity, when our record is already terrible, low growth of the economy, and lost tax revenues, compared with every forecast that has been given, when we get back to tax and spend.

What can be done to rebalance the economy? The Bank cannot help, because of the situation into which the Government have put themselves. Underlying inflation is 2.1 per cent.—below their target. That is the prime aim of the Bank of England, looking forward. Service sector inflation is running at 4.8 per cent. over the past 12 months. Public sector inflation is higher than that. Inflation is being kept down because there is a positive deflation in the price of goods. That is not a healthy way of hitting an inflation target.

The Bank of England is stuck. I agree with Sir Eddie George. If it were to lower rates, it would feed the housing boom and household debt. It cannot do that. If it raised the present rate of interest, it would worsen the difficulties for business investment and business in general. The Bank has therefore stuck at 4 per cent., somewhat powerless in the situation, and left us with the tightest monetary policy in the developed world, but it does not have much alternative.

The bank is stuck partly because of the fiscal policy of the Chancellor. Where does he come in? In my two remaining minutes, I am glad to say that I have no more than to echo what has already been said. What is the Chancellor contributing with regard to the uncertain outlook and the impossible problem of monetary policy? What is his fiscal policy? It has been the consistent increase of taxation. I shall again cite the CBI's perfectly accurate figure: a £47 billion cumulative increase in tax since 1997, which this Government have the nerve to scoff at because they are wrapping and rolling up annual increases, as the Government always used to do in presenting their public sector spending plans to the House. Another £6 billion has already been put in the pipeline for next April in a tax on jobs through national insurance hitting us at this time. The Government have been reminded about their taxation on pensions, which is plainly feeding into a serious pension crisis in this country. That is their contribution.

The Government say that they can pay for all their huge public sector plans without more taxation. Those plans are already feeding into public sector pay.

[Mr. Kenneth Clarke]

They were bound to do so, as they were announced ahead of reform. They claim that the only way in which they can afford to finance those plans is borrowing and that the current debt level is low enough to allow that. It will not work. They will need more taxation if they commit themselves to those plans. Next week, when we return for the autumn statement on the pre-Budget report, we want some honest forecasts and accounts, and we want the Government truly to face up to the impact of what they have saddled us with and its implications for business.

Business must be the priority in the Chancellor's policies from now on, because if wealth creation is damaged in this country, all those plans will fall about his ears—and well before the next election

7.1 pm

Mr. Colin Challen (Morley and Rothwell): I want to focus on the very last sentence in the Queen's Speech, in which the Government pledge themselves to

"work for a successful outcome to the current round of world trade negotiations that benefits industrialised and developing countries alike."

I heartily endorse that aspiration, but I have some thoughts about whether success is around the corner.

The word "success" is highly relative in the context of trade liberalisation. If one harks back to the days of President Reagan, whose economic policies were based on an idea of wealth trickling down to the poor through market mechanisms rather than Government action, one may suppose that a little success has been achieved, as Governments seem to be surrendering more of their economic powers to the market. Our aspirations for lasting gains from trade will wither, however, unless we assert more strongly the human values that are meant to underpin the benefits that are meant to accrue from trade liberalisation. All too often, the terms of the debate have been set by business interests well before they enter mainstream discussion. There is far too much secrecy in the build-up to major negotiations and far too much privileged access to negotiations: our governmental involvement with a private sector committee on the liberalisation of trade in services—LOTIS—is one example of that. Not only do such shadowy groups exist to advance their own agenda, but they discuss ways of attacking their critics.

In a democracy, however, we can be sure that there will be public debate, even if it seems unbalanced at times. Talking in a roundabout way about how the British worker must seize the opportunity to downsize his or her pay packet, Digby Jones, director general of the CBI, recently told us how the Government had got our competitive position all wrong. He said that the Prime Minister is too focused on competing inside the European Union and that we should concentrate on getting the upper hand in competing with the likes of China. To many people, that might sound like very good sense. After all, China is a semi-industrialised nation with one fifth of the world's population, many of whom are skilled. Of course, what Mr. Jones meant was that we have to compete with what is euphemistically described as a flexible labour force—a labour force that is low paid and has low benefits, low pensions and all the rest that is implied by "flexibility". Needless to say, with the stock market currently failing to live up to its promise, low pensions are already here in abundance.

The time has come to take stock of what China's accession to the World Trade Organisation means for world trade. Its entry into the utopia of world trade liberalisation will have far-reaching consequences, not least for the Chinese. One issue on which I do not imagine the trade negotiators spent much time was China's human rights record. I am sure that they believe that, trade liberalisation being the panacea it is, all ills will be cured in time—the positive engagement myth that western countries have embraced since the Tiananmen square massacre. Positive engagement is the flip side to Reaganomic trickle-down, on the basis that unrestrained capitalism cures all if it is left to its own devices and that it must be left to its own devices above all else.

Today's China, with its endemic corruption and secretive, undemocratic Government, offers capitalist enterprise a land of many marvellous opportunities. The country has only one official trade union, the All-China Federation of Trade Unions. The evidence is clear that the absence of independent trade unions in China is a major boon to foreign investors. Here is a country where demands to be paid outstanding back pay, never mind a decent wage, can be crushed with the help of the police and the army, and where the suppression of the work force goes without comment elsewhere in the world. I have not heard of any WTO factotum speaking on the subject, and all that we hear from anybody else in authority is the usual positive engagement routine, saying that one day all will be well.

The right to join an independent trade union is not very high on the WTO agenda. Indeed, the issue is not on its agenda at all, since it says that labour issues are a matter for the International Labour Organisation and have been since at least 1996, when the ministerial conference in Singapore decided that the WTO should not have anything to do with them—I bet that our then Government's representative went along with that all right. That separation of responsibilities is very revealing, since the WTO has many powers to enforce the resolution of trade disputes, but the ILO, wonderful body that it is, has to rely on persuasion.

As always, labour is the underdog. In China's case, the underdog is now represented at the ILO by a representative of the All-China Federation of Trade Unions—in other words, a representative of the Chinese Government, as the two are components of the same machine. How does the federation see its role in protecting workers' rights? The following example of official Chinese trade union thinking, taken from the World Tibet Network News website, gives a mind-numbing flavour:

"To enhance the workability of trade union cadres at all levels, the trade unions at all levels in Tibet organised different forms of training classes on many occasions and gave professional and theoretical training to trade union cadres. With the help of the Workers' Movement College and the regional committee's party school, the regional federation of trade unions successfully trained more than 100 grass-roots trade union cadres, thus increasing the vigour of the trade unions."

The job of those cadres is presumably to tell the people of the Tibetan region—Tibet appears no longer to be a country—that they should be grateful that they have

such enlightened employers or, as they are often told, that they are indeed the masters themselves. They may also be told that if they try to organise themselves, as workers at the Tianshui City Auto Transport Company did when hundreds of them were being made redundant, they could face imprisonment of 10 years to life. They may also be told that their right to strike was abolished in 1982 because Chinese businesses belong to the people.

Today's newly appointed leader of China, Hu Jintao, described the role of the trade unions thus in 1998:

"Chinese trade unions are mass organisations of the working class under the leadership of the party, act as a bridge linking the party with staff and workers and play a role as a key social pillar of the state political power."

Hu Jintao enjoins trade unionists consciously to accept the leadership of the party and consciously to submit to and serve the party and the state—a state whose central Chinese Communist party committee now accepts wealthy capitalists among its membership. No wonder that those who consciously seek to challenge the party and the state come off so badly; they will always be underdogs while they have no right to strike, no freedom of association and no right to organise independent trade unions.

Scores, possibly hundreds, of industrial disputes have led to public demonstrations in China this year and every year for the past decade. The closure of older industrial activities has made millions unemployed, but has also lined the pockets of asset strippers. An example is the fate of the 2,000 workers—mostly middle-aged women—employed at the Shuanfeng textile factory who went on strike. The police dragged them by their hair and jabbed them with cattle prods during a factory occupation. These workers had been forced to buy shares in their own company on pain of losing their jobs. Last November, the company had gone bankrupt, but was started up again by the same bosses, offering half the wages.

The owners, unlike their workers, were at least freed of their previous debts.

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire): What has this to do with the Queen's Speech?

Mr. Challen: If the hon. Gentleman is patient, he will find the answer at the end of my speech.

Such bankruptcies—fake bankruptcies—are common in China. The Ferroalloy plant in Liaoyong province is another example. The average wage was $150 a month for technicians, when they were paid. Corrupt management issued false reports of inflated profits to pay themselves bonuses. Members of the management did so while working in collaboration with the provincial people's congress chairman, Gong Shangwu.

It all sounds pretty familiar, does it not? Supplant Ferroalloy with Enron and Shangwu with a former governor of Texas, and we can see the parallels clearly. As Ferroalloy faced bankruptcy, the workers tried to organise themselves and expose the misdeeds of the management. For their pains they were met with riot police, under-cover police, plain-clothes police, road blocks and paramilitary troops. The entire panoply of state oppression was there to greet them whenever they wanted to organise or demonstrate. These events took place in March and have been fully documented, along with other cases, by human rights watch. They were not fully documented by the local newspapers, of course, since they were told not to report them.

Is that what is meant by having a flexible labour force, against which, according to the CBI's Digby Jones, we must compete? Is it right that we should permit without question China's membership of the golden WTO club, the express concern of which is not to interfere with the comparative advantage of low pay, long hours, poor working conditions and the crushing of independent trade unions that challenge these iniquities? Will the Government call for real teeth for the ILO so that it can impose its sanctions with the same force as the WTO? Will countries that fall foul of the ILO face financial penalties? Or will we be told that insisting on the same standards as we seek to apply at home is an outdated mode of protectionist thinking?

If the WTO or the global business community believe that a nation's comparative advantage may reside in its ability to suppress working conditions and oppress workers, we should pursue a vigorous policy of elevating workers' rights to the same high altitude as is already enjoyed by the free marketeers. Our emphasis in future negotiations should elevate people above property. The current emphasis on the trickle-down approach and positive engagements must give way to a stricter international regime that supports human rights.

7.13 pm

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): I shall focus on three themes, the first of which is that labour market flexibility must mean flexibility for employees as well as for employers. On current reckoning there are 28.6 million people in the British work force, of whom 25.1 million, or 87.8 per cent., are employees. It seems, therefore, that it is obligatory for members of all political parties rigorously, enthusiastically and publicly to debate how to translate personal choice from a political slogan into a welcome fact for millions of our fellow citizens.

It seems the reality that job sharing, part-time working, career breaks and home working will increasingly be vital if we are to achieve both economic efficiency and job satisfaction. There is a responsibility incumbent on each and every one of us to address these issues.

I recognise that the Government have taken a number of steps to facilitate progress. However, if we are to secure a proper balance, much greater attention should be paid to these issues by members of all political parties, including, and perhaps in particular, my own as we seek to take the agenda forward in the much more diverse economic situation and labour market of the 21st century. I would welcome anything that the Secretary of State might have to say on that subject when she replies to the debate. I would be particularly interested also in the vantage point of my hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo), the shadow Secretary of State for Trade and Industry.

Secondly, we need to improve both the quantity and the quality of child care—that is of the essence. I am fully prepared to acknowledge at the outset of commenting on this subject that the Government have taken several steps. These steps have been heavily but not exclusively focused on the demand side of the equation. I do not knock that because the various steps

[Mr. John Bercow]

have made a difference and are proving to be useful. However, there is also a supply side that should not escape our attention. My experience, locally and elsewhere, is that two phenomena are potentially hampering the supply of child care and ensuring the continuation of large gaps in the provision that is required.

The first of the phenomena is the rigidity of the planning process, which frequently is much less friendly than it should be to prospective providers. I have had that experience in my constituency. People have wanted to provide child care, but what I might describe as a backward looking and—dare I say it?—otiose planning process has, regrettably, prevented them getting away from first base. If the Government are considering reform of the planning process—they have certainly earmarked their intention so to do in the Loyal Address—I appeal to the Secretary of State closely to consider how that reform might usefully apply in this context.

Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): The hon. Gentleman is making a good and constructive point. Does he agree that there is an inherent unfairness in the system whereby people who go to employer-provided child care secure 100 per cent. tax relief, whereas those whose employers are too small to provide child care secure no tax relief? Is that not a penalty on individuals who work for small businesses and a penalty on small businesses?

Mr. Bercow: The hon. Gentleman is making an extremely valid point that bears focus and concentration by people in all political parties. It is a widely acknowledged truism that there are many citizens—overwhelmingly women—who would work if they had the option of available and affordable child care. Too often that is not the case. The consequence is both socially unjust and economically inefficient. Therefore, we should be prepared to consider all steps to change that state of affairs for the better.

The second phenomenon that seems to hamper the provision of desirable and affordable child care is an Ofsted inspection regime that is as inflexible as frequently it proves to be burdensome. Once again, constituency experience can aid and abet us in deliberating on these matters. I am aware, for example, of a provider who lives in my constituency who specialises in mobile child care provision. She goes to venues throughout the country offering a service at conference centres and so on. She laments to me and to the Government that she has to comply with a positively Kafkaesque regulatory regime if she is to deliver the service that she would like to provide, admittedly and perfectly properly for a profit. I hope that the Secretary of State will take my remarks in a constructive spirit and offer me a response to what I have had to say.

Thirdly, we need a balanced approach to regulation. Let me own up. I have been as insistent and ferocious in denouncing over-regulation as any other hon. Member. I make no apology for that and I do not resile from that stance. However, as we move forward, it is important to consider regulation in the round. As any commonsense analysis suggests, regulation can be onerous and debilitating but it can be equally enabling and protective.

The Conservative party has an honourable track record on regulating for enabling and protective purposes. Legislation includes: the Mines Act 1842, which stopped children going down mines; the Contracts of Employment Act 1963, which gave people the right to a written statement of their terms and conditions and a period of notice that they did previously enjoy; and the Offices, Shops and Railway Premises Act 1963, which established minimum standards for heating, lighting and ventilating commercial premises. To the enduring credit of my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague), the purpose of the Disability Discrimination Act 1995 was to outlaw discrimination in the workplace against people with disabilities. Those Acts were good, constructive, Tory social reforms in the finest traditions of our party. Their effect was to enable, protect and improve the quality of people's lives.

Some Government regulations are flawed. They include the ozone depleting substances directive and the physical agents directive. The Government have not taken as discriminating and robust an approach as they should have done to defend British interests. Those are examples of onerous and debilitating regulation.

Let us try to expunge the national minimum wage from the daily preoccupation and table tennis of political debate. I was a furious and, I believed at the time, inveterate opponent of the national minimum wage. However, the Tory party and Conservatives at their best are pragmatic. The national minimum wage has not been the disaster that Conservatives, including me, predicted. It has combated genuine exploitation without resulting in the heavy job losses that my hon. Friends and I predicted, partly because it has been set at a relatively low level. We should acknowledge and accept that reality.

Mr. Challen: Did the hon. Gentleman realise that the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) did not answer the second part of his earlier question about increasing the national minimum wage?

Mr. Bercow: The hon. Gentleman expresses his view and I have expressed mine. I shall continue to do that. On the whole, my views on such matters are audible and comprehensible. Discretion dictates that I say no more about the subject this evening.

We have a choice about regulation. We can opt for healthy scepticism, which is sensible, or furious denunciations in principle of every regulation, which is not wise. First, it jars with our historical record; secondly, it strikes many people as indiscriminate; and, thirdly, it is politically counterproductive for my own Conservative party. We should not pursue the matter in that way; it is foolish to do so. We should be more constructive, reasonable and inclined to consider each issue on its merits.

If we accept the premise that employee rights are at least as important as those of employers or that each proposal should be considered in isolation on its merits, we might eventually lose the stigma that results from ritually opposing the rights extensions whenever they are made, only to accept them grudgingly long after the event.

I am making a polite and, I hope, positive suggestion for taking forward our approach in the best Tory tradition. We should oppose what is bureaucratic, poorly drafted and unnecessary, and support what proves wise, beneficial and to the advantage of the British people.

Mr. Simon Thomas: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Bercow: No; I am drawing my remarks to a close.

I believe that my concluding remarks apply to all politicians, about whom there is pervasive cynicism in the United Kingdom. If we, as a class of public servant, are to become popular again, we must be respected. If we are to be respected, we must be credible. If we are to be credible, we must be reasonable. Those criteria must inform public debate and policy making on both sides of the House throughout this Parliament and beyond.

7.25 pm

Linda Perham (Ilford, North): I believed that it was right to apply to speak in today's debate on the economy and trade and industry when I saw Friday's headline in *The Guardian*: "Hewitt Rules the World". Then I realised that I was reading the sports pages, not the business news, and that the headline referred to the world men's tennis number one, not my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. Indeed, Mr. Deputy Speaker, you and I are cricket supporters, and therefore one moves on quickly from the sports pages at the moment.

I warmly welcome the concentration in the Queen's Speech on tackling crime and antisocial behaviour, and investment in and reform of the public services. I am sure that many of us can testify from our constituency surgeries that such matters deeply worry our local residents, who come to us desperate for help to cope with troublesome neighbours, yobbish behaviour, noise, dumped cars and other assaults on their environment and quality of life.

We share the goal of prioritising public services with our constituents. The investment that we have made is possible only because of the Government's achievement of economic stability, low inflation, low interest rates, record numbers of people in work and improvements in employment rights, especially for women and part-time workers.

Britain's entry into the euro is vital to our economy's continuing success. I therefore welcome the commitment in the Gracious Speech to make a recommendation on entry into the single currency on the basis of the famous five economic tests. Fifty-seven per cent. of our trade is with EU member states, generating 3.5 million jobs. My firm commitment to Britain joining the euro has been reinforced by my work on the Select Committee on Trade and Industry.

At the beginning of last year, the Select Committee produced a report on vehicle manufacturing in the United Kingdom after problems at Longbridge with BMW/Rover, at Luton with Vauxhall and at Dagenham with Ford. Clearly, some of the difficulties were caused by issues that related to the value of sterling and uncertainty about our future membership of the euro.

Major car manufacturers such as Ford, Toyota and Nissan have made it clear that they want us to join the euro and that otherwise, inward investment by foreign companies will be put at risk. On 13 October, *The Observer* quoted Unilever chairman, Niall Fitzgerald, who said that if we do not join the euro,

"Britain would float away from being a central part of Europe, which is its major market, and lose influence, investment, jobs and economic growth".

I am pleased with the commitment to rapid progress on EU enlargement. I especially welcome the accession of the Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. The Select Committee was made aware of the enthusiasm of their people to join when we visited the region two years ago to investigate industrial and trade relations.

Cyprus is another country about which I feel passionately, as do many other Members of this House and the other place. I fervently hope that the island's future will be as a member of the EU with Greek and Turkish Cypriots living together in peace and prosperity.

My constituents are greatly concerned about trade with the developing world. A few weeks ago, at the end of One World Week, I spoke about fair trade at two churches in my constituency, St. Mary's in Woodford and Hainault Baptist church. I was therefore pleased that the Gracious Speech reaffirmed the Government's commitments to the agreements made in Monterrey and Johannesburg.

The agreement in Monterrey begins to define our global role. The developed world, through protectionist subsidies and tariffs, imposes poverty and deprivation on billions of people, including countless children. According to War on Want, halving such protection in agriculture, industrial goods and services could boost developing countries' incomes by about $150 billion a year, which is three times the total aggregate aid budget of every country in the world. The World Bank advises that substantial trade liberalisation could reduce the number of people living in poverty by more than 300 million by 2015. At this point, I would like to pay tribute to the Chancellor and to the Secretary of State for International Development for their world leadership on increasing debt relief to the poorest countries.

Hon. Members may be aware of my interest in corporate social responsibility, as I have presented two Bills on the subject to the House in the last few months. At the world summit on sustainable development this year, the UK agreed actively to promote corporate responsibility and accountability through the full development and effective implementation of national regulations, among other measures. I was disappointed, therefore, by the lack of any specific mention in the Queen's Speech of a companies Bill, which would have presented an ideal opportunity to fulfil that undertaking, particularly as our new House rules would enable the legislation to be carried over, if necessary. I should be grateful if the Secretary of State for International Development would tell the House how she intends to fulfil that commitment in the absence of such a Bill in the present programme.

I look forward to examining the proposals for changes to the planning system, particularly those relating to improving the involvement of local

[Linda Perham]

communities. I and many other hon. Members deal with a large number of inquiries from constituents regarding planning matters, and a frequent complaint from the public is that there is a lack of consultation. In recent months, I have had a number of representations from local residents who felt that they had not been consulted or kept informed about the siting of mobile phone masts. The Select Committee on Trade and Industry held an inquiry into mobile phone masts at the beginning of last year because of the growing public concern reflected in early-day motions, Bills and the formation of a national umbrella organisation, Mast Action UK. That organisation has been set up to reflect the concerns made known to us by constituents.

Two of the Committee's recommendations were on community consultation. The first stated:

"It is essential that those closely affected by a possible development hear about it early, directly and accurately. That is the responsibility of operators at least as much as local authorities."

Mr. Bercow: I strongly agree with what the hon. Lady has just said. Does she agree that there are many examples of mobile phone operators treating local communities in which they intend to erect masts with indifference, disdain and contempt, and that if it were not for effective local lobbying and action, those companies would not be brought to book at all?

Linda Perham: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his support on that matter. There have been a number of briefings from those companies, and they are certainly on the defensive. They know that local people should be kept informed, and I hope that we shall make some progress on that. I am sure that many other hon. Members have been lobbied about this; it is a serious matter, about which people care very much.

The second recommendation of the Select Committee stated:

"Changes in the planning regime fail to address the main problem, which is that objection to base stations comes not from local authorities but from individuals who suffer from loss of amenity or fear of ill-effects for themselves and their families. Unless it is clear that the planning system has a robust way of dealing with health fears expressed by people, the results of the changes will be yet more frustration."

Speed of decision making is another cause for concern addressed by the planning Green Paper. A planning application to build a racecourse in my constituency took more than a year to be decided. We must do better. There is also concern that planning reform will be focused too closely on the needs of corporations and may fail to protect the interests of vulnerable individuals. I envisage planning reform providing opportunities for innovation that will finally turn the tide of the housing crisis in London. I dearly hope that the Government will be radical—and, dare I say, bold—in their plans to help the homeless, key workers and, in London, anyone whose salary is less than £30,000 a year, as people in those circumstances have very little chance of getting on the housing ladder. There are 190 families with children currently accommodated in bed and breakfast by my borough of Redbridge. Unfortunately, at the same time, the Tory council is proposing to reduce drastically the density of future residential developments, at a time when homes are most urgently needed.

The Trade and Industry Committee has looked at the matter of Britain's nuclear liabilities, and I am pleased that the Government are taking seriously the need for a resolution to this issue. Nevertheless, I stand by the Committee's recommendation that there needs to be an independent inquiry into the value for money for the taxpayer in transferring those liabilities. Nuclear power is expensive and dangerous, and I am concerned that we may be asked to bail out this industry with many billions of pounds of taxpayers' money. Perhaps we should consider what would be the relative benefit if that money were invested instead in the production of renewable energy or in energy conservation. I look forward to the publication of the energy White Paper next year, and I hope that it will include non-nuclear options.

I welcome the announcement of legislation to enable Parliament to reach a conclusion on hunting with dogs. I share the opinion of more than 300 of my constituents who have contacted me on the issue since my hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr. Foster) introduced his Bill in 1997; the only conclusion is a complete ban. Four hundred and eleven hon. Members voted in favour of that Bill. There could have been no clearer statement of the will of this House than that, and we should have concluded the issue in the last Parliament. I hope that we shall at last, and not before time, end this monstrous, barbarous and cruel practice, which masquerades as a sport.

I support the Queen's Speech and the Chancellor's robust statement of the Government's achievements and future programme. In the absence of any policies being put forward by the shadow Chancellor, the public will judge which party can best be trusted with the future of the country.

7.36 pm

Alistair Burt (North-East Bedfordshire): I am delighted to have the opportunity to contribute to what has already been an excellent and interesting debate. It was opened with characteristic ebullience by the Chancellor, but he seemingly has a certain amount about which to be ebullient. It would be a poor commentator on British public affairs who did not recognise that the public perception of the Labour Government and their handling of economic matters are completely different from that of previous Labour Governments. And yet, as in all classical tragedy, there is a moment at which the greatest strength can start to become the greatest weakness. At a moment of apparent control, having weathered the storms of public perception about what a Labour Government could achieve in relation to the economy, those little things that appear, on the horizon, to be no bigger than a man's hand start to take on greater and greater importance.

The Chancellor was well and successfully challenged by my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) on some of those issues. Labour Members then listened to my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) in a very different way from the way in which they had listened to their own Chancellor, because my right hon. and learned Friend began to drive

home to them that this was a moment of real uncertainty for the British economy, and that all the ebullience in the world will not prevent the Chancellor from missing the problems that will come to dominate the economy.

Those problems will include not noticing that a very difficult public pay dispute that is being massaged towards some sort of a conclusion is being carefully watched by others in the public pay round. They might also include the glossing over of the problem of the very low savings ratio in this country, and not being overly concerned about the steady increase in taxation. At the moment, with all the plaudits ringing in the Chancellor's ears, those things probably seem sufficiently far down the line not to be of concern. They are all, however, matters that will come back to haunt him.

Mr. Hendrick: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) did not make one reference in his speech to the fall in equity prices that has led people to put their money into property, which has, in turn, led to the property boom and to many of the problems that we now face? Neither did the right hon. and learned Gentleman give any indication of what he would do, if he were Chancellor in a future Tory Government, to put the matter right.

Alistair Burt: I think that the record of my right hon. and learned Friend, who created the economy in which the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues have enjoyed themselves so lavishly over the past few years, speaks for itself. As for the hon. Gentleman's concern about falling equity prices and people putting their money into homes, while for whatever reason there may be a housing boom, the fact that such a boom exists and is something of which the Chancellor should take serious note was the point made by my right hon. and learned Friend.

In that regard, my right hon. and learned Friend was rightly supported by the deputy governor of the Bank of England, Mervyn King, who said recently:

"Beneath the surface of overall [economic] stability lies a remarkable inbalance between a buoyant consumer and housing sector on the one hand and weak external demand on the other."

My point is that there is enough evidence of problems for the Chancellor to be more worried than his performance this afternoon suggested. I feel that his failure to act, and the absence in the Queen's Speech of the sort of action that might be needed to assist the economy, imply that the Chancellor is missing something quite significant.

Let me now move from the general to the particular, and talk about some of the factors affecting business and the economy as they apply to my constituency. I want to say something about engineering, and in this regard I am grateful to the Mid-Anglia branch of the Engineering Employers Federation for its assistance.

Engineering and manufacturing represent the silent casualty of recent years. No wonder that casualty attracted no attention from the Chancellor—although it did attract attention from the hon. Member for Ochil (Mr. O'Neill), whose contribution I welcomed. According to the latest survey carried out by the Mid-Anglia branch of the EEF in respect of the third quarter of 2002, 46 per cent. of firms reported a drop in total output volume. Output volume has been in negative balance since the first quarter of 2001. Moreover, 46 per cent. reported a decline in new orders over the past three months. Fifty per cent. said that they had reduced the number of people whom they employed, and 38 per cent. expected reduced capital expenditure in the next three to six months. They, unlike the Chancellor, are worried about where the economy may be going, and are expressing that lack of confidence.

There may be many reasons for these pressures. Our manufacturing industry does not exist in a vacuum—we are part of a global economy, and the slowdown in the economy of the European Community naturally has an effect on us—but Governments can make matters worse. It is significant that those in engineering and manufacturing to whom we speak know that some of the problems lie with the Chancellor, and with the running of the economy. It worries them that the Queen's Speech has not dealt with such matters.

Let me quote from the September 2002 issue of "Engineering Outlook", produced by the Engineering Employers Federation, which covers a wider area than my constituency.

"We start by analysing where the government itself is exacerbating an already difficult situation . . . the overall tax burden has been rising since 1993/94 and is set to hit a 20 year high by the middle of this decade. At the same time, international surveys show that the UK's rating on the regulation burden has worsened in recent years. Though taxation and regulation remain lower than in the rest of the EU, a continuation of current trends risks eroding our historical advantages in these areas."

The article looks at matters in more detail, and then states:

"The results suggest that many companies will take a hit on margins, indicating further bad news for investment."

It concludes:

"Overall our message to government is simple. There is little it can do about the state of the world economy but there is much it can do to ease the administrative and cost burden manufacturers face."

Mr. Jim Cunningham (Coventry, South): The hon. Gentleman probably feels that the issues he has raised are very important, and I do not think the House would necessarily disagree; but does he not expect the Chancellor to deal with some of the matters he has accused him of taking lightly in the pre-Budget report?

Alistair Burt: I might feel more confident if the general display from the Chancellor had suggested that at the back of his mind were certain niggles about where we were going. He has, of course, tried to appear confident himself—a confident Chancellor, with his finger on the pulse—but the impression that is given is one of someone who is missing something that is going on which others are spotting.

Those who have been here as long as the hon. Gentleman and me have seen what goes on. It does not matter which party is in power: Conservative Governments are not immune. A Government may start thinking that what they are doing is so right that they miss something else that is going on. With the benefit of the experience of colleagues, Members sense that the economy is in a particular state. It might be assumed that a Chancellor would say something to ensure that we understood that despite what he might think was going right, certain things might be going wrong.

[Alistair Burt]

Having quoted some general comments made by the engineering employers, I want to deal with particular examples of ill effects that we might expect legislation to deflect. The agency workers directive, which is currently being dealt with by the European Community, will hit industries and others whose time is given through contractual relationships with companies, as opposed to long-term employment. In the aerospace industry, those with particular skills have always tended to follow the work and the pay round. To gain experience, they have moved to different companies after a year or so. They have taken their skills to companies that have needed those skills. The agency workers directive will make it more difficult for them to be employed, and for companies to employ them. Where does the Loyal Address show any concern about that?

The climate change levy continues to have a disproportionate impact on manufacturing. It appears from surveys that Government measures are not encouraging even those hit by the levy to do anything about the problem, so it is doubly ineffective. I listened to the Queen's Speech, but I heard no suggestion that a measure that is damaging manufacturing so much would be repealed.

Small businesses in my constituency bring me problems of a more general nature. In a recent survey, more than 1,000 businesses in the area were asked whether legislative changes over the past year or so had helped them. According to the subsequent report,

"Changes in legislation were felt to have been far more negative than positive. Employment legislation changes were felt to have had a positive effect by only 4 per cent. of businesses compared with 35 per cent. who felt they had a negative impact. A similar story was true of responses on business taxation, such as IR35. Even health and safety changes were positively received by only 11 per cent.

Greatest dissatisfaction was expressed at the rate of change, complexity and volume of legislation. Respondents in the East of England expressed similar levels of dissatisfaction as the rest of the country, with 66 per cent. dissatisfied against 1 per cent. satisfied."

The problem is the cumulative burden of the issues I have raised. That applies whether we are talking about higher taxation, specific measures that damage particular industries, or the growing burden of regulation and bureaucracy. All that is fuelling the gradual collapse and disintegration of engineering and manufacturing in my constituency and the neighbouring area. The loss of jobs and the lack of investment lead to a further loss of confidence, and suddenly, instead of a boom, there is a wormhole. During a boom, as soon as certain issues raise their heads, everything starts to tumble. Given the amount of public expenditure that is based on the continuation of the boom—given the Chancellor's spending plans—once the hopes start to unravel, where will the Chancellor and the economy be?

Farming and agriculture are also important to my constituency. According to the latest survey by the National Farmers Union, 8,500 farmers left farming this year, and 6,600 farm workers followed them. A total of 67,000 people have left farming in six years. Farm incomes are 71 per cent. down on those of 1995. Yet, with rural deprivation growing, the Government plan to take money from rural areas and give it to urban areas in the future. I cannot see that as being fair and just.

Accordingly, I have tried to point out that although there is an understanding of where we are in terms of the world economy—better placed than some—the seeds of destruction are there. If a Government do not pick that up when times are good, they will not notice until things have turned much worse. Then, it will be too late. Be warned, because the House will address those issues again before too long.

7.50 pm

Mr. Nigel Beard (Bexleyheath and Crayford): Taken as a whole, Britain's economic performance has excelled beyond its own record and the performance of the rest of the world. The stability achieved over five years has provided the conditions to address structural weaknesses that have prevailed for many years. Coupled with prudent management of the public finances, that economic stability has enabled the notable deficiencies in our public services—education, health and transport—to be addressed for social as well as economic reasons.

There are powerful pressures toward recession in Europe, America and Japan. The major public investment programme planned for the next three years will help to counteract those recessionary forces in Britain.

The American authorities are also shaping their monetary and fiscal policy to head off recession. Whether it is admitted or not, the UK and USA are following Keynesian principles to enhance demand. In neither case does that take risks with inflation. The expansion is well within the capacity of both economies. That contrasts with the European Central Bank and the German Government, which appear to have a fixation with inflation although the alarm bells warn of recession. Moreover, the cautious inflexibility of the resulting monetary policy cannot be compensated for by more expansionary fiscal policies, because the stability and growth pact will not allow sufficiently large public spending deficits.

There is a need for a commonly agreed and firmly enforced policy to prevent extravagance in Government spending in the eurozone. However, that must take into account the position in the economic cycle and national debt, as the United Kingdom's fiscal rules do. I am sure that there is no one better placed than my right hon. Friend the Chancellor to remind his friends in ECOFIN of the difference between prudence and sadomasochism. Such an over-tight monetary policy and rigid rules restraining fiscal policy are dangerous not just because of the immediate economic consequence, but because, in the popular mind, the euro will become associated with stagnation and recession.

No doubt those anti-Europeans who associate everything from original sin to global warming with the European Union are already saying that those restrictive macro-economic policies are inseparable from monetary union, but they are wrong. The stability and growth pact needs amending to something nearer the UK's fiscal rules, but the concept of European monetary union does not need to be set aside to achieve that. Japan provides a cautionary tale as to what could happen if it is not done. That economy continues to be in thrall to deflationary forces, which have proved very difficult to throw off.

There is a real risk of the world economy in general moving into a similar position. With American interest rates at 1.25 per cent., there is not far to go before US monetary policy can have no further stimulating influence on the US economy. If Europe keeps on digging its current hole deeper, there will be no source of economic growth in the world and contraction of the world economy becomes possible. If that happens, Britain cannot escape the consequences, no matter how wise its economic policy may be.

I do not believe that deflation is the most likely future for the world economy, although I do believe that it is sufficiently possible that we should establish what to do if it happens. The nearest the world economic community has come to a contingency plan appears to be whistling in the dark to keep the evil spirits at bay. A beginning would be my right hon. Friend the Chancellor telling our European friends about the third law of holes, which is, "If you're in one, stop digging." That is a profound truth enunciated by his predecessor, Lord Healey.

Beyond that, no one really knows what to do to counteract world deflation. For that same reason, the world economy languished in such a condition throughout the 1930s, only to be pulled out of it by the second world war and the Keynesian economic policies that followed it. I ask the Minister, what steps, as a contingency measure, are being taken to map out an approach to deflation at home and to develop a concerted international approach if that should become necessary?

I turn from the gloomy possibilities to the more usual probabilities for the future—namely, that the economic cycle will continue, with counter-cyclical macro-economic policies modifying the peaks and troughs so as to avoid the boom and bust that we have come to associate so clearly with Conservative Administrations.

In recent months, growth has been sustained by high consumer demand based, to an extent, on increased personal debt. Underlying that, however, have been certain imbalances such as the growth of the service sector along with difficulties for manufacturing, a significant balance of payments deficit and continuing house price inflation. Such inflation, which makes the conduct of monetary policy so difficult, reflects the fact that too few dwellings are being built. The programme recently announced by the Deputy Prime Minister is addressing that problem.

The other issues are interrelated. Despite the general growth in the economy, to which services contributed, domestic manufacturing has not been able fully to supply the increased demand for goods. Thus, imports have been sucked in. The high value of the pound against the euro has reduced the competitiveness of manufacturing exports, just as the volatility of the exchange rate over many years has reduced incentives to invest in manufacturing.

Manufacturing is the key to curing many weaknesses in the economy, and it is not just a few bricks in the economic edifice—it provides the keystones and the flying buttresses that keep the whole building upright. Manufacturing is the source of most of our export earnings. Without it, a vast range of skills and abilities could not be used for the economic benefit of either individuals or the country. For all those reasons, it is essential to place on productivity the emphasis that the Chancellor has provided. Government policy is now putting that into practice.

Our productivity lags behind that of competitors. For example, the USA has more graduates in the work force while the European Union has more people with intermediate qualifications in the work force. Investment levels are poor, because economic instability has led to uncertain expectations of reward. As a similar consequence of short-term horizons, research and development as a proportion of gross domestic product has been falling behind the figure among competitors and innovation has not been foremost among management objectives.

All those issues are being addressed by Government policy, which is underpinned by maintaining economic stability. The exchange rate remains a maverick element, distorting both import and export competition. The trade element of the $100 billion that crosses the world's exchanges every day is minuscule. The exchange rate is not settled by considerations of the competitiveness of goods traded, as traditional economic theory would have it.

To take the random foreign exchange element out of manufacturing competitiveness, it is imperative that this country join European monetary union. That would eliminate the impact of volatile foreign exchange rates for the majority of our overseas trade, which would also be no worse than for any other EU manufacturer when exporting outside the EU. For the same reason, the exchange rate affects the prospects for inward capital investment in manufacturing from overseas. There are already signs of that investment falling away because Britain is outside the European monetary union. We should not forget that after the industrial mayhem produced by the overvalued pound in the early 1980s, inward investment has sustained this country's technical and managerial skills in several industries, such as motor manufacture.

One the famous five tests is the impact on the financial services industry of joining European monetary union. I do not demur from that, but given the role that manufacturing industry plays in the economy, it has a claim to be up there, too.

Alone, we cannot escape from the effects of worldwide deflation, if that should happen, but we can prepare contingency plans to minimise the impact and to speed recovery. Equally, alone we cannot protect our industry and thus our economy against the maverick effects of today's foreign exchange markets. The solution to that is ready for us to take up by joining European monetary union.

Mr. Hendrick: My hon. Friend said that changes to the stability and growth pact were needed. If those changes were not made, would he still be in favour of entry, notwithstanding what he said about manufacturing industry?

Mr. Beard: I would still be in favour of joining European monetary union, because if we are to influence the stability and growth pact and what comes after it, we will do better within than without.

[Mr. Beard]

For the reasons that I have given—the exchange rate and the risk of deflation—the only way to protect and advance the welfare of this country is to take concerted action with allied nations. There is no economic future for Britain in the false superiority of sullen isolation.

8.2 pm

Mr. Simon Thomas (Ceredigion): I am pleased to respond to the Government's legislative programme on behalf of Plaid Cymru. I was interested in the Chancellor's ebullient opening remarks. He was confident and positive, and much of what he said was correct. I want to concentrate on some of the regional disparities that have grown up in the past four or five years and the effect that that has had on Wales. Many Members from other parts of the United Kingdom, including the English regions, will find something to agree with in what I am about to say.

Some of the economic indicators of what has been happening in Wales in the past five years do not show such a rosy picture. In 1998, there were 204,000 manufacturing jobs in Wales, whereas the figure is now 187,000. When the Government came to office, gross weekly earnings in Wales were 89.1 per cent. of the UK average, which is more than 10 per cent. behind, and the figure is now 86 per cent., so the position has worsened. The number of VAT-registered businesses in Wales was 94.5 per cent. of the number of UK businesses, and now the figure is down to 90 per cent., so we are losing our businesses as well. When the Government came to power, the index of production and construction in Wales was 95.6 per cent. of that for the UK, and it is now 91.4 per cent.

However the economic fortunes of 1997–98 were created—I accept that there is a ping-pong battle about who was responsible—there is no doubt that in the past four or five years the position of Wales has declined in relation to the rest of the United Kingdom. It is that position that we want to see reversed, and that we want this legislative programme and next week's pre-Budget statement to address.

One tool that is specific to Wales is objective 1, which is a six-year programme of regional structural funds from the European Union. I welcome the objective 1 programme and the way in which it is working. It is a sign of weakness, but nevertheless it is a tool to improve the Welsh economy. It is regrettable that, in the first two years of objective 1, we have been able to commit only 77 per cent. of the resources available. The most under-committed part of objective 1 is that dealing with infrastructure, and I shall concentrate most of my remarks on that.

The subtext of the Chancellor's remarks was that unemployment was no longer a problem. We need to consider the unemployment figures very carefully. In Wales, the percentage of people living in households with at least one person unemployed has gone up in the past four years from 15.6 to 16.7. The number of people in employment, which is a bit different from the unemployment figures, has declined. In Wales, the figure is now less than 70 per cent., whereas the UK average is about 75 per cent. Neath-Port Talbot, which covers the constituency of the Secretary of State for Wales, is languishing at 56 per cent. of the working-age population in employment.

As well as the sickness statistics, the problem of people who do not choose to register for employment and the difficulty of getting women into the employment market because of the lack of child care are infrastructure problems in the Welsh economy. That is reflected in the average earnings figure for Wales, which is £380 a week compared with £440 a week for the UK. The infrastructure difficulties in the Welsh economy should be addressed.

It is fortuitous that this aspect of the Government's legislative programme is being discussed tonight, because today Plaid Cymru launched its economic strategy for Wales. I am sure that hon. Members will be interested to know what it contained, so I thought that I would take this opportunity to tell them what we propose. There is a UK economy and a set of UK fiscal measures to deal with that economy, but the presence of the public sector has a specific bearing with regard to Wales, because 60 per cent. of the Welsh economy is based on the public sector as opposed to 40 per cent. in the rest of the UK.

Certain aspects, such as the public finance initiative, public procurement and the Barnett formula, impinge on the economy of Wales in a way that they do not in most of the UK, although they have resonances in some parts of England. We would like a statement on the Barnett formula. It was not in the legislative programme, but it may be appropriate for the issue to be included in the pre-Budget statement next week. We do not think that Wales has anything to lose from a review of the Barnett formula or from the establishment of a more needs-based formula. Indeed, many areas in England would also benefit from such a review. I think that many Labour Members would be interested in a review to see what it would bring to their regions, particularly with regional government now being introduced in England. The United Kingdom overall would benefit from a lack of regional disparities.

Mr. Andrew Love (Edmonton): Has the hon. Gentleman checked with the Scottish National party?

Mr. Thomas: The hon. Gentleman will be present tomorrow night when the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) will hopefully catch the Speaker's eye to make his views clear about where he stands on this matter. I am speaking for Wales and for Plaid Cymru.

The response of the Liberal Democrat and Labour coalition Government in Wales to these challenges has been pretty abysmal. The economic strategy of the National Assembly was published after the objective 1 programme started, so the unique fiscal tool that we have in Wales, which is separate from what happens at a UK level, was in place before any strategy was established. The strategy fails to address the real needs. It has wonderful targets: we would all like the GDP of Wales raised to 90 per cent. in the next six years, but it will not happen, certainly not as the strategy sets out. We would like 135,000 jobs to be created in Wales in the next six years, but I doubt that that will happen, not without a strategy to increase the number of businesses in Wales, especially small and medium-sized businesses, which is what Wales specialises in. It will not happen without helping existing businesses to grow, and without a way of sharing economic success throughout Wales.

Under the National Assembly for Wales and the objective 1 programme, the majority of jobs in agriculture are based in Cardiff, which is not the most agricultural part of Wales and nor is it in the objective 1 area. Surely at the very least we should roll out public sector jobs in Wales: agriculture to the west and objective 1 jobs to the north.

We have set out the key tasks for Wales in the economic development strategy, and we would like to see the Government's legislative programme help them. They include regional development within Wales and a plan for jobs within Wales; for example, we do not have control over the Office for National Statistics, so we do not know what the labour market assessment in Wales is at the moment. We must wait two years until it filters down to us. That is vital to Wales, as is selecting the most promising sectors for development in the Welsh economy.

In my constituency, we have just lost Dewhirst, a clothing manufacturer from the town of Cardigan. The company was lost because it is cheaper to make jeans in Morocco and Turkey than in Cardigan. It has nothing to do with the work force, who were effective and efficient. It was often said that they were the best in the group and they were the last to go, which says something about them. However, 400 jobs lost in a small market town of 2,000 people is a big blow to take. Some 80 people have found jobs with local businesses. The small and medium-sized enterprise sector has picked them up, although some have to drive for more than an hour and a half to get to work. However, that leaves 300 people without jobs and another 150 jobs are to go at the old Ministry of Defence range at Aberporth. Those constituents who are affected will ask what is in this legislative programme for them. What can they take from it? There is nothing that we could usefully use in Wales—"neutral" would be the most generous description—to support the sectors that we can grow in my constituency and throughout Wales.

There are sectors at which we can look, such as renewable energy. It is important that the energy review will come from the Government very soon and I agree with the hon. Member for Ilford, North (Linda Perham) that we need to invest in renewables and not nuclear. That is pertinent to Wales.

Mr. Love: The history of choosing winners in Wales is not a good one. Is the hon. Gentleman suggesting that politicians can choose those sectors of the economy in which we ought to invest?

Mr. Thomas: The hon. Gentleman makes a reasonable point. It is not for politicians to choose as such, but it is for politicians to note which sectors are likely to be goers in Wales. For example, we have the Welsh Development Agency—it is independent, and many parts of England would like something similar—to do the groundwork. However, without the labour market assessment, it is difficult to see the way forward. We are not talking about picking winners and then expecting inward investors; we are trying to pick some sectors that are growing with indigenous Welsh businesses, and support them to create more employment opportunities. That has been shown to be more successful in the longer term than getting interim investment. I do not have to talk about the LG plant in Newport; the hon. Gentleman may remember that example.

Another important factor is IT and, in this context, the communications Bill will be vital. Out of the 11 indicators of IT take-up promoted at an EU level, Wales lags at the bottom of seven in the UK and is in the bottom three in all 11. Only 30 per cent. of SMEs in Wales have a website. Here in London, the figure is 65 per cent. That digital gap in Wales, parts of England and Scotland will grow unless Ofcom and the Bill provide a statutory duty to ensure the roll-out of broadband and IT communications to all parts of the UK.

We can imagine what would have happened had we left electricity connections in rural areas to the free market. There are still businesses in my constituency that do not have mains electricity. That would have been worse had we not faced the challenges in the 1950s and 1960s of getting mains electricity to all parts of the United Kingdom. We must get IT and broadband to all parts as well.

My final point concerns agriculture. Reference has been made to common agricultural policy reform, and I agree. If there is genuine CAP reform, which looks at sustainability, the countryside and the unique role that agriculture plays in Wales in sustaining rural tourism, the language and social cohesion, I do not think that Welsh farmers will have much to fear. However, we do fear a fudged reform in which France, Germany and perhaps the United Kingdom fudge around the issues, try to protect some interests and do not address the over-production issues in agriculture. With farm incomes in Wales at £4,200 in upland areas, farmers have everything to play for within CAP reform. However, there are also huge dangers in the way in which the present bigger political game is being played out.

Plaid Cymru views the present legislative programme as a continuation of present policies. Regional disparity has widened in the past four or five years; it is likely to do so again under this programme. In Wales, we want a proper Parliament with tax-varying powers to look at things such as corporation tax, and to employ an economic strategy that builds sustainable development in Wales, to help indigenous businesses, to address the increasing number of economically inactive people in Wales and to raise the wealth of the people of Wales.

8.15 pm

Keith Vaz (Leicester, East): I am happy to follow the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr. Thomas) in this interesting and important debate on the Queen's Speech. I was astonished that we heard yet again from my near neighbour in the east midlands, the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke), who claimed to have been responsible for the economic success of the Chancellor of the Exchequer and followed that shortly after by denouncing those same policies and predicting doom and gloom for our country.

I would like to pass on my thanks on behalf of my constituents to the Chancellor for his wonderful stewardship of his office and for delivering the prosperity that our country has had over the last five years. As we have heard from many of my right hon. and

[Keith Vaz]

hon. Friends, we have the lowest inflation, the lowest level of unemployment and the lowest interest rates for years. I want a continuation of those policies because it is only through that that we will be able to implement the promises that we made in our manifesto.

The Queen's Speech is a repetition of the radical and modernising agenda that we have put forward over the past five years. Unless we have a proper stewardship of the economy, we cannot spend the money wisely on our social programme. The Queen's Speech sets out a number of important areas of legislation, all of which merit attention and none of which could have been carried out but for the economic success that we have achieved over the past few years.

I want to mention the emphasis in the Queen's Speech on law and order, and fighting crime and the fear of crime. If one looks at the printed version of the speech, the whole of the front page deals with law and order legislation, the reform of the criminal justice system and putting victims at its centre.

A constituent came to me last week. She was a victim of crime who had been assaulted by an individual. She went to court and waited in the witness room for more than 12 hours before her case was called, only to be told that the charges against the person who had hit her had been dropped by the Crown Prosecution Service. I want to ensure that once the proposed legislation in the Queen's Speech is passed, the victim will be at the centre of the Government's attention.

I welcome the thrust of the Queen's Speech. My hon. Friend the Member for Ilford, North (Linda Perham) mentioned Europe and the euro. I know that she was depressed when she read the sports pages recently because like me she is a supporter of Leicester City football club. I can assure her that we are second in the league, that we are going up and that we will be in Europe in two years. In the meantime, it is important that the Government have re-emphasised our commitment to the EU. The Government are pro-euro and pro-Europe. We have made it clear that the five economic tests will have to be assessed in June next year.

My plea to the Economic Secretary and, through him, to the Chancellor, is that once the tests are met, we need to get on with a decision on the referendum as soon as possible. If we do not, this could be a saga even longer than the Eurovision song contest. People are waiting for the economic tests to be assessed and we are happy to accept the judgment of the Chancellor on this issue, as we have been happy to accept his judgment in the way in which he has been running the economy. It is important that we get on with the decision. We know the Government's formula. If the tests are met, there will be a meeting of the Cabinet, a decision by Parliament and then an all-singing, all-dancing referendum. I hope that that timetable will be stuck to very soon after the tests are assessed. Of course, if the tests are not met, we will not have a referendum—I understand that—but it is important that we move forward.

Enlargement is very much on the agenda of the Ministers' meeting in Brussels. A date for enlargement should be set at that meeting—1 May 2004. It is essential that we stick to that date because the entry of the 10 applicant countries is vital to the success of our economy and the economy of Europe. It will create the largest single market anywhere in the world—a single market of 500 million people—and provide the security and umbrella of co-operation that have been missing from Europe over the past few decades.

All the applicant countries want progress on enlargement. I am grateful to our Ministers for doing so much to ensure that the enlargement process has taken place. In his speech in Warsaw two years ago, the Prime Minister gave it a suitable boost.

I have just two final points to make because I know that many of my colleagues wish to speak, although it appears that not many Opposition Members do. That shows that the case advanced by the Chancellor of the Exchequer is unanswerable. There appear to be only two Back Benchers left on the Conservative side—

Mr. Henry Bellingham (North-West Norfolk): Conservative Members are at dinner.

Keith Vaz: Oh, they are at dinner. Some of us have been here for the past few hours listening to the Chancellor and to the other speeches but I am not surprised that the Conservatives have run out of speakers.

I want to say something about regeneration because I see that the Minister for E-Commerce and Competitiveness is on the Front Bench; the Department of Trade and Industry has responsibility for regeneration. I thank the Government for all the money and resources that they have given to the people of Leicester but I worry about our regeneration strategy. People do not understand when they hear the vast figures mentioned in relation to regeneration. They want to see regeneration on the ground. They want to be part of the regeneration process. We cannot have Canary wharf being built throughout the country. People can see flagship regeneration schemes. We must involve people in that regeneration process.

I am sorry that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry is not here. I pay tribute to her for her work as Secretary of State and her outstanding work as a constituency Member. We share Leicester with my hon. Friend the Member for Leicester, South (Mr. Marshall), and she is assiduous in her constituency duties. She has been around a lot of the textile firms in our city and seen for herself the problems in the textile industry.

In 1981, there were 19,900 jobs in the industry in Leicester. Today, there are only about 7,700. I do not blame the Government for that but I ask the Secretary of State—I know that this matter is close to her heart—whether we can have some measures to help us to redress the balance—some assistance for the textile industry in Leicester. It has benefited from the economic policies of the Government but needs specific help, because many countries dump their goods within the EU area and many other EU countries do not stick to the EU's rules and guidelines. The textile industry in Leicester and throughout the country has been very good in sticking to the rules. We just want a level playing field.

If anyone can help us, the Secretary of State can. She will want to make a special initiative of that. I cannot invite her to visit Leicester because she is Member of

Parliament for Leicester, West and visits every week. I just ask that, in her busy schedule, she remembers us in Leicester and the textile industry in particular.

I am happy to support every measure in this Queen's Speech. It is a radical and modernising Queen's Speech that Labour Members are proud to support in full.

8.24 pm

Malcolm Bruce (Gordon): We have had a number of speeches that related to the euro and I want to say only one thing about it. Increasingly, I find among businesses throughout the country a deep desire to end the uncertainty that means that they cannot put in the necessary decisive planning. People can put up reservations about when the right time will be, but it is infinitely more damaging to the country to have a Government who say in principle they want to join but cannot tell us when or under what circumstances. They are not allowing businesses to plan. The uncertainty is deeply damaging.

I echo the concerns expressed about the fragility of the British economy. If we go through each sector of the economy, it is difficult to find what constitutes the success that the Government are claiming. Manufacturing has been effectively in recession and jobs and investment are falling. Farming is in a disastrous plight. Tourism is in huge difficulty. Telecommunications is not exactly thriving and the stock market is at its worst level for many years. The only thing sustaining the economy is property prices and the borrowing against that. If those were to take a nosedive, the Government would be in deep and serious trouble. No one wants that to happen but we are all saying to the Government that they should resolve the uncertainty of the euro and remove that one fundamental problem—it exists whichever side of the argument one is on. There is an inability to plan ahead. Businesses have to deal with the consequences of being outside. The Government must recognise that the economy is so unbalanced that if we do not use the opportunity before we hit a crisis, we will have nothing to fall back on when we do.

I want to raise a number of specific matters arising out of my constituency concerns. I represent an area that is heavily dependent on farming and food processing. There is no doubt that they are suffering severely. The biggest single thing that they are suffering from is the adverse effect of the exchange rate.

My other industries include paper making. There is no doubt that it is a difficult industry to be in at the moment. It is important that the UK maintain a paper-making capacity.

Mr. Love: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Malcolm Bruce: I will not because we are anxious to ensure that as many hon. Members as possible get to speak.

It is important that the Government recognise that many of those businesses are hanging by a thread and that if the issues are not resolved soon, they will not be able to hang in there for much longer.

The oil and gas industry is very important in my part of Scotland. The Government produced tax proposals in the last Budget without consultation and without warning that have deeply damaged confidence in the industry. I know that the Government will be able to point to academic studies that bear out the claim that the package of measures will benefit investment in the established fields. It will if the royalties part of the package is delivered. The industry is getting increasingly irritated that the Government are giving assurances that royalties will be abolished but have not yet explained why they have not been abolished, or abolished them.

The Government should not underestimate the damage that has been done to the confidence of what is a mature province. The industry has many opportunities to deploy its investment elsewhere in the world. There is no incentive within the Government's tax regime to look for new, more marginal fields that will sustain the life of our province. There is a real danger, therefore, that potential oil and gas reserves will never be recovered from the North sea, if the existing regime continues in its current form. To my mind, that would be both a waste of resources and deeply damaging to an industry that is very important. It provides about a third of a million jobs and a very high proportion of UK industrial investment, which the Government continually treat as a milch-cow rather than a real industry that sustains jobs at home and exports abroad.

On the back of that, it is important to take on board the ridiculous state of the electricity market, which is having very serious repercussions. A questionable investment of £650 million in British Energy may yet be vetoed by the European Commission—a clear indication that the electricity market that the Government boast about simply is not functioning. If it is functioning, it is telling us that nuclear power is so expensive and dangerous that it should be taken out of capacity and off the market. Doing that overnight would present a range of practical and capacity problems, but we should not allow the market to be distorted.

Those of us who want a real commitment to expanding energy efficiency, particularly through investment in combined heat and power and in renewables, want a framework that makes some sense. At a meeting in my constituency on Amec's proposal for a very large wind farm, I made it clear that I support wind technology. I am pleased that one wind farm has been given the go-ahead in my constituency, but we should note that a large protest movement is already asking a question that those of us who support renewables are having difficulty answering. That question is, "If we don't happen to like the look of these wind farms, can you explain to us what the benefit is to our rural community in accommodating them?"

We are talking about an international company that employs nobody from the area, sends letters from somewhere in deepest England and has no real understanding of, or connection with, what we are about. We get no rent for such farms, because Forest Enterprise is involved and the money will be taken outside the area. Indeed, there is no perceivable economic benefit. The Government should think very hard about structuring the development of renewable energy to ensure that the communities that play host also get a share of the economic benefit—for example, a royalty from the units of energy generated.

[Malcolm Bruce]

As an MP for a Scottish constituency, I know that Scotland has committed itself to 40 per cent. renewable energy by 2020. The question that is being asked, however, is why should Scotland do it? What will Scotland get out of it? The UK will get the benefit of assistance in meeting its Kyoto objectives, but if all these investments are to be carried out by multinational companies with no significant base in Scotland simply to export electricity to England, it seems that no obvious benefit flows to the Scottish economy. I urge the Government to think hard about structuring the development of renewable energy in a way that gives the host communities a real economic stake in it.

I am also concerned about the overall condition of the privatised utilities. It is some 12 to 15 years since they were privatised, and we need to reassess how they are performing in a somewhat contradictory market. Nobody is suggesting that we could, should or would wish to unscramble privatisation. As somebody who served on the Bills that privatised gas and electricity, I can testify that we did not oppose those privatisations in principle. We did criticise the way that it was done, and we pointed out that there would be problems. Gas's privatisation as a monopoly immediately led to an inquiry by the then Monopolies and Mergers Commission. In the electricity industry, distortion of the market led to the collapse of coal industry and the dash for gas. That wasted a great deal of money—never mind the billions of pounds of support that has been given to try to massage the real cost of nuclear power.

Whether we are talking about electricity or telecommunications, a clear conflict exists between the objectives of private companies and their need to make a return for their shareholders, and the fact that they remain public utilities, providing vital services for which there needs to be a public policy delivery. Last week, the Minister and I attended a meeting on post offices. At the end of it, I mentioned my concern about broadband. There are businesses in my constituency that depend heavily on a regular daily postal delivery service—preferably early in the day. They are deeply concerned at the prospect of a two or three times a week service and of perhaps having to collect their own mail. They regard that as an unacceptable threat to the viability of their business. They could of course get round that by using modern technology—broadband technology—except that it is not available in rural areas. Indeed, huge irritation has been caused by advertising campaigns by British Telecom and others asking people to sign up, and explaining that broadband is cheaper, better and more efficient. However, if it is a rural postcode, such companies say, "Ah, not only do we not serve your area, we have no plans to do so—unless you're prepared to go and find our customers for us." Ministers—I do not mean the Minister who is in the Chamber—say that they are talking to BT. Well, excuse me, BT is a private company but we are talking about a public service.

Many of us look to the Government either simply to require the providers to give a universal service or to help them to do so; I do not have a strong view about which would be best. When Hydro-Electric was set up in the 1940s, it was required to provide electricity to pretty well every property in Scotland, including the north and the highlands and islands, and it has done so substantially, and spread the cost among all the suppliers. That would be a reasonable way of delivering broadband, with only very marginal exceptions requiring to be paid for separately or excluded.

The electricity market is in a mess, and nothing in the Queen's Speech will help. The new electricity trading arrangements are not working, and now the British electricity trading and transmission arrangements are mooted. It is not the right moment to go to BETTA, when NETA is getting worse.

Other utilities are operating in a contradictory market, trying to make a return for their shareholders and operate as a private business while being asked to provide a service for the whole community, which they are conspicuously failing to do. The Government, in the Queen's Speech, seem unwilling to do anything about that.

8.36 pm

Laura Moffatt (Crawley): I am pleased to support the contents of the Queen's Speech. It is difficult for us to choose which aspect of the speech to speak on, because it is apparent that all its aspects are interdependent: for example, a safer community attracts business, and education and skills training are essential for a thriving economy. It is important to consider all those aspects when we discuss trade and industry and economic matters.

It is important for me to contribute as a south-east Member. It is all too easy to think that the south-east is comfortable and has plenty of jobs, and that we do not need help from the Chancellor's policies. I hope to demonstrate that it is extremely important that we look after the region's delicate economy.

My constituency is in Sussex, in a region that is our second highest contributor to gross domestic product, and Gatwick airport is at its heart. It is easy to understand the impact of 11 September. People from my constituency had to leave their jobs on 12 September, because they could no longer pack metal cutlery to go on the aircraft. The impact was real and painful. Sussex Enterprise has been very helpful. We were afraid that it would be a very difficult picture, and although we have not got back to the employment position of before 11 September, the impact has been far less than we feared.

The reason for that is stability. Companies have felt reasonably calm about the future, so they have not overreacted and laid people off in a zealous attempt to protect their own interests. The stability created by the Chancellor's policies had a very positive impact in limiting job losses. It is difficult for those who lost their jobs, but they are far fewer than we expected.

We in the south-east face many challenges. It is a lovely place in which to live, but that is difficult because the average house price is £140,000. Low interest rates give people the opportunity to get into the housing market, so that policy has had an important and positive impact on my constituency. I remember when massive interest rates meant that young people felt they had no opportunity to enter the housing market, and they had no sense of having a future in the south-east. It is important to ensure that our young people can participate in the economy of the south-east and do not

feel that they have to leave to find job opportunities elsewhere because of the difficulties of living in the region.

There is long list of policies—not only those announced in the Queen's Speech, but those introduced throughout this Parliament and under the Labour Government—that make it possible for families in the south-east with relatively moderate or low incomes to survive and feel good about the contribution that they make to the economy. Let me outline some of the specific issues that face us.

Many hon. Members have heard their constituents say, "Goodness, there are so many empty offices around—why are you building offices when we could have housing?" In the south-east, it is vital to have a healthy portfolio of offices to allow companies to change and grow. In any one year, about 1.5 per cent. of our business community changes premises—not leaving Sussex, but moving within the Sussex economy. It is vital that we continue to support that community, so reform of planning will be essential to ensuring that we have a healthy and vibrant business property market that enables that growth to continue. Limiting growth in the south-east does not benefit anywhere else in the United Kingdom. We now know that to be true. Once, we thought that if we tried to redirect everybody elsewhere, everything would be fine, but the reality is that we must allow our positive and vibrant business communities to thrive and survive.

Let me describe how important policies and fiscal influences are to my community. In education, we have to tackle the skills gap to ensure that we have people who are fit to take up the jobs that we need done. It is not good enough to say that we in the south-east have lots of jobs and people will fill them. We must make sure that people are in a position to fill high-tech jobs, or that they can go to university and then fill the graduate jobs that are so important to us.

It is important to understand that policies such as sure start and good child care are economic policies. Women walk into my office in Crawley and say, "Thank you very much. My child is now in a nursery, I have been to college and I now work at the airport." It is thrilling to be able to experience that sort of thing, and, to be frank, we would like more of the same.

The working families tax credit has transformed the lives of 10,000 families in Crawley, and I am sure that other hon. Members can say the same of their constituencies. On average, my local families receive £25 a week, which enables them to survive in an expensive part of the world. They have to pay more for housing and transport, so working families tax credit is crucial to them.

Investing in our health services ensures that people are able to live and work and be serviced by good public provision, such as hospitals. We in Crawley have had enormous investment: we await a decision on whether to have a new hospital or to have massive investment in our existing hospital. That sort of investment was unheard of before, but it is vital to our economic well-being.

In housing, ensuring that our local authorities are able to deal with the supply problem in the south-east and that we are able to provide decent, affordable housing are vital if people are to be able to remain in the south-east. The Government have also provided huge investment for transport—£12.5 million has been added to the £23 million scheme to allow people to move between Crawley and the airport. We have never before seen such investment.

This great family of policies contribute to our well-being. They are part of what is making this country a better place to live, and my constituents reflect that.

8.45 pm

Mrs. Angela Browning (Tiverton and Honiton): The Chancellor had much to say about enterprise, and I shall concentrate on a particular group of entrepreneurs—small businesses and the self-employed. Some 55 per cent. of our private sector work force is employed by small businesses, so they are in the majority. I was rather disappointed that the Gracious Speech did not include a robust deregulation Bill that sought tangibly to remove the burdens on small businesses.

This country has had a reputation for having flexible labour markets and low levels of regulation, certainly compared with some of our European partners, but that situation is being increasingly transformed, particularly by the introduction of European legislation. When will the Government call a halt to that? When will they demonstrate that such regulation, which is now a burden on businesses on all sizes, but especially on small businesses, will be removed or moderated?

The self-employed, many of whom start out working from home, have particular concerns. *The Mail on Sunday*, which I know is read avidly by Labour Members, reported yesterday that the Chancellor intends to cut out red tape to help entrepreneurs mainly as a result of the plunge in self-employment in the past year. Perhaps we shall hear more about that in the Chancellor's autumn statement, but with the possible exception of some relaxation in the planning laws for businesses, there was nothing in the Queen's speech to make me think that the problem is being taken as seriously as it should be.

Self-employment is becoming increasingly difficult, but once one has established a business, it is more difficult still to make the quantum leap to take on another person and to assume the responsibilities of an employer. I was alarmed to hear that the Inland Revenue is being extremely active in identifying self-employed people who work from home with a view to taxing them through the business rates. An article in *The Times* last month made it clear that thousands of people have already been hit with bills of up to £600.

I am referring not to people who have, for example, changed their outbuildings into a large business but to people who are working from a bedroom. Apparently the Treasury's guidance includes a 6 o'clock rule that if domestic use can take place in a room after work has finished it is unlikely that business rates will be charged. I was self-employed and based at home for many years, although I travelled a lot, and there is no way that I would have wanted somebody going into what I called "my office" after 6 o'clock and doing anything with my paperwork or my computer.

I have to say to the Minister that we are getting mixed messages. The Chancellor talks about entrepreneurs, who are the backbone of the economy, risking their own capital to set up a business, often in a small way to begin with. However, punitive laws and regulations will put

[Mrs. Angela Browning]

them off taking that risk. We are already seeing enterprise stifled in many small business areas. Residential and nursing homes have come under pressure, and we have debated many times in this Chamber the difficulties facing them. Sub-post offices and rural petrol stations are also experiencing difficulty. We all know that it is hard to get a plumber or electrician. Regulations affecting self-employed plumbers and electricians put people off doing the job, even though they can apparently charge whatever hourly rate they like. At the moment, it is not a question of whether or not one can afford a plumber—they can name their own price. It is about getting someone reliable to come along and do the work.

Many small businesses in waste management are under huge pressure. My hon. Friend the Member for North-East Bedfordshire (Alistair Burt) pointed out that the Chancellor must be aware not just of burdens imposed by the Government on business but of external factors that have an impact on entrepreneurs and the business economy. At my surgery a fortnight ago, I met a gentleman who is the third generation of a family business in waste management and employs just 20 people. He has had great difficulty obtaining public liability and health and safety insurance—at my business breakfast club last week that theme was picked up by people from just about every sector in my constituency. People who have been able to get insurance have found that premiums have gone up by more than 100 per cent. this year. The gentleman in waste management, for example, has to have a minimum insurance cover to get a licence and undertake work for local authorities such as fridge and car disposal under contract. He went right up to the day that his policy was due for renewal—even then, he had difficulty getting sufficient cover to be licensed to carry out those contracts.

Businesses in my constituency have asked whether their problems getting insurance and, if they are lucky enough to get it, the huge increase in premiums are a one-off or whether they will experience the same difficulties next year. Many of them say that if there is a repeat next year they will think twice—they may lay off employees and shrink their businesses rather than expand them. For some, it will mean the difference between staying in business or going out of business completely. Since 1997, there has been a plethora of tsars, envoys and all sorts of people with grand titles who all turn out to be Lord Haskins trying to reduce regulation on the Government's behalf—it does not work. My hon. Friend the Member for North-East Bedfordshire mentioned the European Union directive on temps—the Government, we are told, are braced for defeat this week. Marketplace flexibility and 160,000 people will be affected, yet it looks like the EU will force the Government to comply. The Government, however, are completely impotent to do anything.

Environmental taxes are being introduced. The Government were warned of the impact of the climate change levy, particularly on the manufacturing sector—I attended a briefing at which the Minister was lobbied by the industry about that long before it became law. It is not as if the Government have not had fair warning of all the factors that are having an impact on engineering and manufacturing. The Engineering Employers Federation says that there is going to be doubling of the landfill tax. I do not expect the Minister to say yea or nay, because he is in purdah—he can nod discreetly across the Floor of the House to me if he wants—but businesses affected by the plethora and cost of regulation, as well as additional Government taxes, cannot take any more.

Entrepreneurs are far from thriving in the small business sector. People do not want to take the risks that they would take in an economic climate with low interest rates. It is always more difficult to set up and run a business when interest rates are high because few businesses can run on capital without a high element of borrowing. Even at a micro-business level, businesses are struggling and are disincentivised. Nationally, we are seeing a reduction in our competitiveness. Another factor that the Chancellor did not mention is how we have slipped down the world's competitiveness league table since this Government took office.

The Government seem unable to do anything about yet more regulations from Brussels—this time to do with financial services and the way in which our mortgages are set. We were told in yesterday's papers that the DTI is fighting back as new mortgage rules from Brussels hit us. It was interesting to hear the Under-Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, the hon. Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Miss Johnson), who is responsible for consumer affairs, pointing out how important mortgages are to such a greater number of people in the UK by comparison with other European Union countries.

I smiled just a tad as I heard the Chancellor talking about the five economic tests and I witnessed the euphoria of Government and Liberal Democrat Members over taking us into the euro and scrapping the pound sterling, because here we have a Minister on one hand pointing out the economic differential and differences in mortgage regulation between our economy and those of other EU states, while on the other trying totally to ignore the fact that the same would almost certainly apply to the setting of mortgage interest rates. Ministers seem very willing to concede such power to a body outside these shores.

The House has heard me before on the subject of the pound sterling versus the euro, and I promise will do so on future occasions. I would not want the unemployment of Germany or the fines imposed on Portugal. I certainly would not want the problems that Germany has experienced with its increased taxes. Why we should want to give up what the Chancellor paints as a sound economy for that sort of mess and chaos I really cannot imagine.

8.57 pm

Richard Burden (Birmingham, Northfield): In the short time that I have available, I should like to say a few words on the regional angle of the Queen's Speech, which has been touched on already today, but on which we shall have our main debate tomorrow.

Getting regional government right is hugely important, not only constitutionally and because it concerns reconnecting the citizen with the political process, but because it is vital to securing sustainable industrial and economic development. The reasons for

that are fairly clear. We know that the gap between the best-performing regions and the worst-performing regions of England in gross domestic product per head is 40 per cent.—one of the biggest disparities in the European Union.

There are equally large disparities in productivity and in education and skills. It has been estimated in a Department of Trade and Industry and Treasury report that if we were able to level up average productivity performance to that of the best, the average person in the UK would be £1,000 better off. There are also disparities in the skills agenda. We have a great skills base in the west midlands, yet it is a source of anger to me and to many that we still have the second worst record on people having no qualifications.

Manufacturing is still hugely important to the west midlands; it accounts for 22.5 per cent. of the region's employment, compared with just over 15 per cent. nationally. The automotive sector is still at the core of the west midlands regional economy, and we are doing quite a lot regionally to try to bolster and modernise that. The Accelerate programme—a great partnership between the DTI and the Society of Motor Manufacturers and Traders forum—was pioneered in the west midlands and is doing very well. We have a modernisation and diversification programme, in which the regional development agency is actively involved. Indeed, I helped a number of businesses launch a seminar on that just a couple of weeks ago. The results of such effort are businesses competing not just domestically but internationally. Their ability to get the right advice and support to raise their game and productivity, and to spread best practice, is great to behold.

Motor sports and performance engineering—I draw Members' attention to my entry in the Register of Members' Interests—is a vital industry for the UK. In that industrial cluster we are world leaders, but we face big international threats. Again, it is great to see the RDAs coming together and working with the industry to secure the future. I am glad to see my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry taking a personal interest in that industry by bringing together a competitiveness panel to look to the future. If all those initiatives are to succeed, it is important that we keep them action-focused.

In the west midlands, our rich industrial heritage and our ideas base are being brought together in a bid to bring the national microsystems and nanotechnology centre to the west midlands, the heart of manufacturing, which would benefit other regions as well as ours. Birmingham international airport is an institution that is not only vital for transport links, but brings £165 million into the regional economy. All these aspects are important and are evidence that we are getting our act together in the region.

However, there is a gap. There is still a democratic deficit in that structure. About £8 billion is being spent in the west midlands by bodies that are often doing a good job, but do not have the necessary accountability to the public. That is a practical as well as a democratic problem.

We know that Germany is facing severe economic difficulties, but we should not lose sight of the fact that some of its successes in the second half of the last century, and some of its successes in rising to the present challenges, were conditioned by the fact that German political, industrial and financial institutions are intertwined at national and at regional level. On the Select Committee on Trade and Industry, we received powerful evidence from the Work Foundation about how and why it is so important for raising industrial competitiveness to get such intertwining and complementarity right. That is why the regional angle is important.

It is also essential for the Government to continue their good work in looking for new models of corporate governance. Community regeneration can play a role in building a healthy regional economy. That is why I was pleased that in the last Budget the Chancellor announced new initiatives to promote community reinvestment. I hope that in the winding-up speech today we will hear a little more about how that will be implemented.

I know that time is short and other hon. Members want to speak. In conclusion, one size will not fit all for regional assemblies. I am not interested in merely creating a new layer of county councils—county councils on steroids, so to speak. That is not what regional government or regional assemblies are about. If we can think creatively about democratic regional government, and be clear that we are not just combining local government functions, but providing a real voice for the region in the European and international context, regional government for England could be a very exciting prospect. It will help to reconnect the citizen with the political process. Equally important, it is a vital element in securing the industrial and economic regeneration that areas such as mine in the west midlands so desperately need.

9.3 pm

Mr. Jonathan Djanogly (Huntingdon): British business is hurting; of that there can be no doubt. The Chancellor spoke earlier of falling unemployment, but I found that grossly complacent. Thousands of jobs are going by the day in the City of London, in manufacturing, where 400,000 jobs have been lost since 1997, in the high tech and communications sectors, which have had the stuffing knocked out of them—only last week, 3,500 jobs went at Cable and Wireless—and in agriculture-related businesses, which are in desperate straits.

My hon. Friend the Member for North-East Bedfordshire (Alistair Burt) gave a good picture of the situation in the eastern region, which is also my region. Some 41 per cent. of companies are showing falling output, and there are declining new orders, reduced staff numbers and reduced capital expenditure. All those issues present a very serious picture that goes somewhat against the complacency shown by the Chancellor. How the situation changes in the public sector, where there are increasing head counts across the board. Not only are there more employees, but requests for wage increases of up to 40 per cent. are being made at a time when people in the private sector are worrying about whether they will have a salary at all.

Business is now starting to see what Labour is all about. It now realises that 80 per cent. of the £4.5 billion of taxes raised this year is coming from business. As

[Mr. Jonathan Djanogly]

more people in the private sector lose their jobs and start to see public sector salary hikes without improvements in public services, they will see how their companies—and therefore, indirectly, themselves—are having to pay for Labour's tax and spend policies. At the same time, companies are now also realising that they have had to pay 87 per cent. of all the tax hikes made since 1997—some £29 billion, according to the CBI. That is apart from the fact that they are reeling from so many regulations.

We have a Government who are increasingly obsessed with micromanagement and intervention to equalise regulations to the lowest common denominator with our European neighbours. The result is that we are fast losing our competitive advantage in an increasingly world economy. We have fallen from ninth to 19th on the world competitiveness scoreboard and our share of world exports is falling, together with poor rates of productivity that are rapidly falling behind those of America, France and Germany.

Burying our heads in the sand and ignoring the impact of the global economy and possible deflation, with the introduction of endless new regulations, may keep the unions happy, but, as the 950 employees of Black and Decker who lost their jobs in the Prime Minister's constituency know, it is destroying our ability to compete. Where are those jobs now? They are in the Czech Republic, because we can simply no longer compete in terms of labour costs and taxes.

Rather than face up to the problem, what are the Government doing at the moment? They are delaying the inevitable by restricting the movement of goods and people from our new eastern European partners. In short, we try to make them less efficient to hide our own deficiencies. Yes, the economic slowdown is global, but the less flexible our markets become, the less we can adapt to international pressure. While the Chancellor equivocates over the euro, we are losing sight of the big picture.

I do not feel that the Government are advising people on the real implications of technology; of course, cheap travel and communications are the core components of globalisation. The fact is that the service sector is now every bit as much at risk as the manufacturing sector. Clerical jobs can be carried out at a massively lower cost in the east than in this country, which is why banks and other institutions are now transferring their operations abroad. One can set up a call centre in India and employ bright university graduates who speak perfect English at one fifth the cost of employees in this country. Indeed, I was delighted to see that the Department of Trade and Industry has significantly increased its staff numbers in China, not least because, at this rate, that is where most of our services sector and manufacturing could be located in five years' time.

If we are to survive as a serious business player and encourage more investment, we must act now to cut taxes on business and start excluding companies from regulations—especially smaller growing firms. As the Federation of Small Businesses has rightly pointed out, such firms incur a much large proportionate negative impact from such regulations than larger companies.

Mr. David Laws (Yeovil): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Djanogly: No, I am afraid that I will not do so, given the time that remains.

The lack of engineering-based apprenticeships and the shortage of skilled staff is also of enormous concern. Employers in my constituency continuously mention that to me, and much more needs to be done. Two weeks ago, I visited a university to be told that it is cutting its engineering courses because of lack of demand and increasing its psychology courses. I think that that says it all.

Finally, I was disappointed not to see the long-awaited companies Bill in the Queen's Speech. British company law is in urgent need of reform—I declare my interests as a corporate lawyer—and after three years of consultation on this largely uncontentious issue, business wants the Bill and we should get on with it.

9.10 pm

Mr. Jim Cunningham (Coventry, South): The Queen's Speech gives Back Benchers an opportunity to talk about things that we would to like to see in the Queen's Speech but which do not appear in it. That being so, we hope to see them in the pre-Budget statement. I hope that my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Government Front Bench will take note of what I have said.

Today, the shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer missed a golden opportunity—it is only about a month since the Conservative party conference—to tell us about the 20-odd new policies that the Conservative party has developed. He was repeatedly challenged, and I thought that we would hear something about the new policies. We did not. We waited in vain. Perhaps we shall hear something about them next week. I look forward to next week's debate. Let us see whether the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) announces his party's new policies then.

It seemed that at the Conservative party conference those present were going through the process of telling the truth and admitting their guilt in the past. The chairman of the Conservative party talked about the arrogance of previous Tory Governments, as did the Leader of the Opposition, and said that Conservatives wanted to change their image. No one really knows where the shadow Chancellor stands on that. He did not declare himself. I do not know whether the right hon. and learned Gentleman wants to put me right on that. He has the opportunity to do so. I do not know whether he is at variance with the leadership of the Conservative party or whether he will tell us all about where he stands.

The Opposition talk about regulation. When the Conservative Government were in office—I was working in industry at the time—we had a heck of a lot of regulations. Opposition Members in glasshouses should not start throwing stones at Labour Members. However, I take the point that we should not overburden small businesses with regulations. We should think through carefully any regulations that we introduce.

The Opposition are in danger of talking the country into recession. It is suggested that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer is approaching the economic situation in a disinterested or cavalier manner. When we used to say those sorts of things in Opposition, we were told that we were talking the country down. I hope that the Opposition's intentions and their economic strategies are not designed to do that. Indeed, we have heard about generating confidence. I am sure that confidence is not generated when the Opposition go down the road that they chose to take this evening.

We all remember the exchange rate mechanism shambles. I remember it in Coventry, where companies were going to the wall. We also remember high interest rates. I am sure that many Members will remember that they reached 22 per cent., with VAT at 17.5 per cent. Conservatives say that they represent the party of low taxes, but we remember when there were high taxes under a Conservative Government.

I shall move on to the positive rather than the negative in having a go at the Opposition. As I have said, I look forward to the pre-Budget debate. Anyone who has been a member of the Select Committee on Trade and Industry and has visited Washington will know, having talked to people in world trade organisations, that the two big difficulties will be the French or the Americans. The Americans use their defence budget for various development projects, and we should not lose sight of that. When British Governments try to negotiate on the same basis, they are told where to go. At the same time, there are concerns about third world debt and the closure of European markets to third world trade. I appreciate that the Prime Minister and the Chancellor have taken a lead on that, but I hope that we shall return to considering such subjects shortly. Again, that must be placed against the background of the lowest interest rates for a generation and probably longer. It was probably in the early 1960s or late 1950s when interest rates were last at 4 per cent.

We should be worried about Britain's manufacturing base. The west midlands manufacturing economy probably employs a quarter of our labour force. That is a hefty chunk, which will be affected if there is a recession in the area. As hon. Members know, in Coventry, and probably nationally, there have been job losses at Marconi, and we do not know whether the company will survive. We all want it to survive, and perhaps the Government can reach some conclusion about whether we can use broadband to help it.

Other household names in Coventry, such as Massey Ferguson, have suffered, and Rover recently had to be assisted, in some instances by the Government, but also by the sheer determination of the labour force. In the west midlands, we have a labour force that is second to none; it has the ability to adapt and the determination to succeed.

I welcome the Government's new manufacturing strategy, which is the first for 30 years. It should help, but there remains a need for inward investment. We need more investment in transport, which is the basis of the economy. Transport costs can also affect product costs.

Some of my hon. Friends mentioned the regional development agency in the west midlands. It has established training and support programmes for automotive component companies. Nevertheless, I believe that it should be more dynamic and I hope that colleagues will accept that. The trade unions that I have met have not been impressed with the west midlands regional development agency's responses.

Many of my constituents are worried about tuition fees, and I hope that the Government will not introduce them in this Parliament.

On antisocial behaviour, I should like the Government to consider fireworks legislation carefully. Fireworks are a growing antisocial phenomenon.

9.17 pm

Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell): Our economy has prospered recently under Conservative and Labour Governments because, unlike the rest of Europe, we have a diverse, deregulated economy that has also been a low tax economy for a long time. Those gains are now being wasted. Step by step, the Government are interfering, regulating and taxing the creative, wealth-generating parts of our economy. The consequences will come home to roost.

The past five years show what can happen. Businesses and industries in which the Government have interfered have almost universally taken a step backwards. For example, the pensions industry was burdened with a tax of £5 billion and considerable Government interference. The establishment of stakeholder pensions has substantially reduced the margins of the financial services industry without generating much take-up. Consequently, our financial services industry is in a worse state than it has previously been in my lifetime.

The Government have failed to recognise the importance of profit and of businesses making money. They use a rhetoric that consistently decries success in our businesses and does not like our biggest companies to make significant amounts of money. The implications for our companies are fundamental. That is apparent in the performance of our pension funds.

Mr. Marris: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Grayling: I am sorry, there is not time.

The utilities sector represents the worst example of Government intervention, with the windfall tax and the over-regulation of sectors such as the electricity industry, the consequence of which is that many parts of the industry are almost no longer viable. British Energy is having deep financial problems, we are seeing the closure of power stations, and electricity companies are being taken over. The truth is that today, five years after the windfall tax, most of our major utilities have been taken over by overseas competitors, because they are no longer able to withstand the strength of their competitors' balance sheets, or the pressure from companies in countries that provide a degree of protection to their utility sectors. Our utilities have been left bare on the international stage.

We must also consider the impact of over-interference in the telecoms sector. The Government were no doubt delighted by the windfall that they secured from the mobile phone auctions. Many of our providers had no option but to enter that auction; if they did not bid, they did not have a business. Our telecoms sector has been significantly weakened as a result.

[Mr. Grayling]

It is in small business, however, that the real impact of over-regulation and over-taxation is being felt. It is crippling many of our smaller businesses, particularly those experiencing more difficult times. In the year and a half since I became a Member of Parliament, I have seen very little evidence that Labour Members truly understand the problems and issues involved in running a small business. Almost no Minister has had experience of running a small business. Ministers do not understand the human consequences of what they are doing.

Life in a small business is one of long hours and business uncertainty. Life becomes much more difficult when times are tough, as they are increasingly becoming now. I know that from experience. I have been in front-line business, in a concern in which the funding stream from a parent company dried up almost overnight when the company went into financial difficulties. I have also been in a company whose biggest customer went bankrupt, leaving us with a huge challenge to keep the business afloat. The last thing anyone needs when trying to keep a small business afloat in difficult times is additional taxation and regulation, yet that is what the Government are offering today. Next April, all small businesses will face a significant increase in the taxation on the employment in their companies, regardless of whether they are making money. That will mean fewer jobs.

This is the wrong moment to introduce more regulation. The Government are once again conducting a review of employment laws. We are seeing new directives coming from Brussels—often gold-plated in this country—such as those affecting agency workers and the haulage industry. We are also hearing about the Government's plans for landfill tax. Perhaps they are desirable for environmental reasons, but the consequences to a small business of implementing them could be devastating.

I see a common theme in the sectors that have suffered in recent years, and in the smaller business sector, which is increasingly coming under pressure, particularly in manufacturing—increased taxation and Government interference. The consequence to the wealth-creating part of our economy will be devastating if the Government carry on in this way. They must stop before it is too late.

9.23 pm

Mrs. Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside): I would like to call on the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry to intensify their good work in supporting enterprise in the knowledge economy, particularly in developing excellence and in building on the excellent research work being carried out in our universities and other institutions outside the south-east. There will be a number of opportunities for them to show that commitment during the next 12 months.

At Daresbury, the Centre for Accelerator Science Imaging and Medicine—the CASIM project—is proceeding, and the fourth-generation light source is moving ahead very satisfactorily. The Sirius project for the detection and treatment of cancer appears to be more problematic, however. At Liverpool university, five-star graded departments have set up the AIMES project—the application of internet technologies and emergent systems—to develop grid technology for the support of business.

In that gem, the Liverpool school of tropical medicine, expansion is being sought to enable the school to continue its work in beating disease, developing health services and fighting poverty in developing countries across the world. In the last two or three weeks its director, Janet Hemingway, and her colleague Alastair Craig have published groundbreaking research on malaria treatment.

We have some of the means to deal with such issues. The Government are clearly supportive, as is the North West development agency, and in appropriate cases Liverpool Vision is giving its backing; but I would feel far more confident if we had a directly elected regional assembly that demonstrated transparency in decision making and followed up these vital matters, recognising the importance of enterprise and the knowledge economy in the north-west and elsewhere. I support what was said about this by my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Richard Burden).

I urge the Government to engage in joined-up thinking in this vital effort. I urge them to continue to support enterprise and the knowledge economy in the regions, and to remember that enterprise, expertise and excellence are not confined to the south-east. Indeed, developing the regions is part of developing the excellence of the United Kingdom.

9.26 pm

Mrs. Annette L. Brooke (Mid-Dorset and North Poole): I want to talk about funding for my local police authority in Dorset. I trust that the buoyant economy described by the Chancellor will provide a real opportunity to address the inequities in funds for different authorities.

This year's Queen's Speech contained even more proposals for law and order legislation. I believe that since 1997 there have been 20 such Bills, and we have criminal justice and antisocial behaviour Bills ahead of us. Some proposals are welcome and others less so, but the Government clearly recognise the concern and, indeed, fear that arise from a perceived or actual increase in crime. That is undoubtedly uppermost in the minds of many, including my constituents.

Violent crime has risen in Dorset, although Dorset is one of the safest places in the country. However, much of the existing and proposed legislation will do no more than move the deckchairs on the Titanic unless police authorities receive adequate funds. The Government have, at long last, increased police numbers, and my police authority is on target to achieve a record number of 1,410 officers by March 2003. Only last Friday, however, along with other Dorset Members, I was invited to hear powerful representations on future funding for our councils, police and fire authorities. We were told that the Dorset police authority needed £6 million just to stand still.

All our police authorities are experiencing pressures. There is, for instance, the issue of police pensions. Others have mentioned the general question of pensions today. It is vital for our public services—our fire and

police services—that the Government help. It is predicted that pensions in Dorset will represent 25 per cent. of the budget by 2005–06.

My hon. Friend the Member for Truro and St. Austell (Matthew Taylor) spoke of micro-management. A further pressure arising from police reform relates to the expected national policing plan. Targets will be set, and it seems that individual forces will have to prove that they can use extra Government money to produce better results. It is a familiar story in every public service: more demand, more red tape, and, in this instance, the question, "Will officers be kept off the beat rather than, as we want, on the beat?"

There are further pressures, caused by public expectation, internet crime and so much more. What I want to know is whether Dorset's police will receive the extra money they need. Consultation is in progress on five options for funding. My police authority fears—let us set aside the "floors and ceilings" proposal for the moment—that 300 officers may be lost. It is an enormous problem, which applies throughout the south-west.

Either council tax will go up massively, or there will be massive cuts in police numbers. We have heard nothing about possible reforms in the way in which money is raised locally.

Successive Governments have reduced and changed Government funding of our local services, putting pressure on the council tax—an inequitable tax that needs to be reformed in the general round of the economy. We need a more equitable and fairer system of local taxation if the trend of pushing more and more on local councils and local bodies is to continue.

I want to refer briefly to the fire service, which has been mentioned by many Members. People want a quick and fair settlement, with modernisation taken on board, but the important point is that the Chancellor finds the funding from the Exchequer.

I shall conclude, as I am conscious of the time. The issue of policing, which is vital to my constituents, links into the economy, particularly the local economy. Unless we get our policing right, all our businesses and the quality of life of all our residents will be affected. It is essential that the Chancellor address it in the round.

9.31 pm

Mr. Tim Yeo (South Suffolk): I congratulate the hon. Member for Mid-Dorset and North Poole (Mrs. Brooke) on making a speech that might be more appropriate to Wednesday's debate. She stuck honourably to the time available and I am grateful to her for that, as is, I am sure, the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry.

I hope that the Chancellor will return before I sit down, so I shall save my remarks on his speech for a moment or two. I pass straight to the speech of my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke), his immediate predecessor as Chancellor, who gave a much more realistic and, indeed, sober analysis of the prospects facing the British economy than did the Chancellor. My right hon. and learned Friend included a timely warning about the unsustainable nature of a number of current trends, for example in household debt, the savings ratio, business investment and several other areas.

I would like to find something nice to say about the Liberal spokesman, the hon. Member for Truro and St. Austell (Matthew Taylor), but the kindest thing to say is that, on the evidence of his remarks, the Liberal Democrats remain firmly anchored in cloud cuckoo land.

My hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) gave one of the thoughtful speeches for which he is becoming renowned, although I am grateful for the fact that he has no opportunity to cast his vote at the end of the debate as I cannot be held responsible for failing from the Front Bench to persuade him to support us. He spoke eloquently on the need for flexibility for employees as well as for employers and on the need to maximise job opportunities for women. I say quite genuinely that I would welcome his advice on how regulations might be revised with those concerns and a number of his others in mind. I hope he discusses that with me in due course. He is engagingly frank about the direction and extent of his political journey; my only hope is that it does not take him too far.

My hon. Friend the Member for North-East Bedfordshire (Alistair Burt), whose remarks were reported to me, made a strong speech that rightly emphasised, among other things, the disastrous consequences of the agency temps directive not only for the engineering and aerospace industries, but for many others. Other Members referred to that most important measure, the key point of which is that it bears particularly onerously on this country. It is a European Union measure, but, because of our employment patterns, Britain will be hit harder than our main competitor countries.

The hon. Member for Dumbarton (Mr. McFall), the Chairman of the Treasury Committee, rightly condemned the continuing scandal of the common agricultural policy. I can only say that it is a pity that France and Germany have so little respect for the Government's views that they recently stitched up a deal to preserve the CAP for many more years to come, without any reference to British Ministers.

The hon. Member for Gordon (Malcolm Bruce) gave a timely warning on the impact of Labour taxes on North sea oil and gas. I share those concerns. My hon. Friends the Members for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning) and for Epsom and Ewell (Chris Grayling) made powerful pleas on behalf of small and medium-sized enterprises. I endorse all that they said about those vital contributors to the prosperity of the British economy. Few groups suffer from the burden of over-taxation and regulation as acutely as small and medium-sized enterprises.

The hon. Member for Birmingham, Northfield (Richard Burden) expressed the hope that the forthcoming regional assemblies may help the economy of the west midlands, among other places. I am glad to have a chance to express my opposition to the establishment of regional assemblies. Another tier of government will do nothing to improve the competitiveness of British business, just as it will do nothing to put a single policeman on the streets, a single nurse on the wards or a single teacher in the schools. There will merely be more politicians and bureaucrats, and I have never found anyone in my constituency or elsewhere who thinks that an increase in those two categories of people will do any good.

[Mr. Tim Yeo]

My hon. Friend the Member for Huntingdon (Mr. Djanogly) rightly described the damage to our competitiveness inflicted by more regulation and less flexible labour markets. I shall save up what I intended to say about the Chancellor in the vain hope that he will return before a quarter to 10.

The key question that we should address is what the Queen's Speech means for business and for enterprise. What is there in the Queen's Speech to arrest the deterioration in Britain's competitive position, to which my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) referred in his powerful response to the Chancellor of the Exchequer? What is there to speed up productivity growth, which has halved in the five and a half years of Labour Government since 1997? What is there to halt the decline in business investment? The answer is not very much.

We know what is not in the Queen's Speech. There was no announcement of higher taxes; indeed, one was not needed, because the Chancellor already announced higher taxes for 2003 in his 2002 Budget. The increases in national insurance contributions hit both employees and employers with an extra £8 billion of taxation. The Engineering Employers Federation says that those increases will mean that more firms will send jobs abroad. More than half the companies surveyed by the EEF said that the national insurance contribution rises would reduce employment levels. I hope that when the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry concludes the debate she will tell us whether she spoke up for British business when she heard that the Chancellor was to impose those increases. Perhaps she was able to persuade the Chancellor to curb the amount by which he originally wanted to raise national insurance contributions. Possibly she heard about them so late in the day that it was too late to have any input. Like my right hon. and learned Friend, I fear that the third option is the most likely.

Tax increases do not have to be announced in the Queen's Speech, because, sadly, under the Labour Government, businesses have had to get used to having tax increases sprung on them year after year. The pensions tax takes £400 a year from every contributing member of a pension scheme. The climate change levy, which has nothing to do with climate change, is a burden on many businesses. A Queen's Speech that contained a proposal to abolish the climate change levy and replace it with an emissions trading system would have received a warm welcome from industry and from Conservative Members. The petroleum tax, the aggregates tax and many more taxes are burdens placed on business by the Government. The Confederation of British Industry estimates that Labour has added £47 billion to industry's tax bill. That burden has been referred to and needs to be stressed. Few people can be optimistic that that figure will fall in the near future.

Something else that was not mentioned in the Queen's Speech was the thousands of new regulations that the Government will introduce during this Session of Parliament. The Institute of Directors estimates that those regulations will cost business £6 billion a year. Ministers talk the language of deregulation, but the experience of millions of business people, small and large, up and down the country is different. More than nine out of 10 businesses surveyed by the Institute of Directors believe that the burden of red tape relating to employment law is growing. In view of that, is it any surprise that the number of jobs in the private sector has now started to fall, as my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe said? Many of us fear that although unemployment may remain low for some time to come, we have a situation where the loss of jobs in the private sector is merely being masked by an increase in jobs in the public sector, another of the unsustainable trends that the economy is now facing.

Lord Macdonald has argued that not all the regulations are aimed at business. He cited orders dealing with road closures as an example in an article to which my right hon. and learned Friend the shadow Chancellor referred. Only someone who spends his days being whisked around in a chauffeur-driven limousine could make such an absurd claim. The traffic chaos caused by road closures, however necessary they may be, inflicts a huge extra cost on business in lost employee time and late deliveries. The British Chambers of Commerce has estimated that road congestion now costs business £19 billion a year. There is nothing in the Queen's Speech that addresses that problem, either.

There is no Bill to stop the Mayor of London bringing the traffic in our capital to a total standstill. There is nothing to prevent London's decline from a great capital city to one whose transport system would be an embarrassment to a developing country. The misery that Labour's transport disaster imposes on private citizens and business alike, the damage it has done to our tourist industry, the erosion of Britain's appeal as a location for international business; not one of those problems is addressed in the Queen's Speech.

Equally serious is the omission of any reference to another crucial element in our national infrastructure, broadband. Many parts of Britain—sadly, they include much of my own constituency and many other rural areas, as the hon. Member for Gordon said—cannot access broadband. They see advertisements for broadband and know that it will not reach them in the foreseeable future. Those parts will be at as much of a disadvantage as the areas with no proper road connections. The Government set an ambitious target for broadband in Britain but we have been lagging behind other G7 countries in terms of broadband subscribers. On this issue, as on so many others, Labour Ministers complacently seem to think that rural communities can be ignored.

Energy policy is another concern. In addition to the White Paper, which is late, we are to have a liabilities management agency Bill that is actually only a draft. The Government cannot postpone indefinitely decisions about nuclear power. The deadline for sorting out the future of British Energy now looms very close. The Secretary of State committed £650 million of taxpayers' money without having submitted herself to questions in the House since making the decision; questions such as when Ministers first heard about of the extent of British Energy's problems and whether the Treasury overruled the Department of Trade and Industry over the renegotiation of British Energy's contracts with BNFL. If she cannot shed light on those questions this evening, will she at least confirm that an oral statement will be made to Parliament about the British Energy bail-out

and the £650 million loan before the final date? Since Parliament is not sitting on 29 November, that means we need a statement no later than 28 November.

Another subject on which the Department has been conspicuously silent is rural post offices. Five weeks ago, when confirming the closure of many urban post offices, the Department was busy trailing news of a £450 million plan to help rural post offices, since when there has been total silence. Surely we are due at least a re-launch of the policy. Sub-post offices in my constituency and in other rural constituencies look forward to learning more details of what the Government have trailed in the press. *[Interruption.]* I am delighted that the Chancellor has returned just before I am to sit down.

The Chancellor opened the debate in characteristically cracking form—I have long been a connoisseur of his speeches. We all recognise that he is formidable debater, with a style that reminds me somewhat of my noble Friend Lord Heseltine, who had the same breezy disregard for facts that did not suit his argument and the same confident trumpeting of successes regardless of whether the achievements were his responsibility or someone else's.

The Chancellor shares another characteristic with Lord Heseltine. They both cherished ambitions to lead their parties and both believed that they could do the job better than the Prime Ministers whom they served. Indeed, the Chancellor's speech sounded to me suspiciously like a leadership bid, with so many successes being trumpeted. I have to say that many of my right hon. and hon. Friends wish him well in his leadership ambitions. But I wonder whether he has started to believe that the connection between hubris and nemesis has been permanently suspended.

The clear message from the debate is that the Government's mood about our economic and business prospects remains one not of optimism but of complacency, not of realism but of self-congratulation, while the people who have first-hand knowledge of what is happening at the sharp end know that business of all kinds is facing a tougher and tougher climate where new taxes and new regulations are increasingly undermining Britain's competitive position.

9.45 pm

The Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (Ms Patricia Hewitt): This has been a lively, instructive and often thoroughly enjoyable and entertaining debate, especially for those of us on the Labour Benches watching the debate on the Conservative Benches—in particular the exchanges between Mr. Nice on the Conservative Back Bench and Mr. Nasty on the Conservative Front Bench.

Several hon. Members referred to the position of manufacturing. My hon. Friends the Members for Ochil (Mr. O'Neill), for Leicester, East (Keith Vaz), for Birmingham, Northfield (Richard Burden), for Coventry, South (Mr. Cunningham) and for Bexleyheath and Crayford (Mr. Beard) all referred, rightly, to the importance of our manufacturing sector to the future of our economy. We all know—several hon. Members have referred to it—how tough it is for manufacturing firms and manufacturing workers when the markets in the rest of the European Union, in the United States and in south Asia have all been so hard hit.

As my right hon. Friend the Chancellor said today and on many other occasions, despite the decisions that we made five years ago and the enormous strength and stability that those decisions have brought to the British economy, it is impossible to insulate every one of our manufacturing firms and exporters from the difficulties and downturn in the rest of the world economy. However, as we know, not only from every manufacturer that we talk to but from just about every business leader, what they welcome and need most of all is precisely that climate of economic stability, the lowest interest rates, the lowest inflation, the lowest unemployment and therefore the lowest bills for unemployment for more than 30 years.

Mr. Ian Davidson (Glasgow, Pollok): Does the Secretary of State recognise that French unemployment has risen every month for the past 17 months and does she accept that that is a clear indication that the euro is not working?

Ms Hewitt: My hon. Friend makes an important point about the level of unemployment in France. In many other continental countries, unemployment is far higher than our own. I would not myself attribute that to the effect of the single currency, which has enormous benefits in terms of transparency and the reduction in exchange rate and transaction costs that its gives, particularly to manufacturers. However, those problems of high and stubborn unemployment within the eurozone are one of the reasons why this Government have been the leading proponent of economic reform in the European Union and we will continue to be so.

Alistair Burt: No Conservative Member denied the problems and issues affecting manufacturing industry in relation to the global climate, but our point was that manufacturing had raised several specific issues that had caused it problems and had been laid at the Government's door, from national insurance to the climate change levy. The Government cannot blame world economic conditions for that. Why do not the Government take notice of what manufacturing is saying and change some of the things that manufacturing wants them to change?

Ms Hewitt: I do not know whether that was a bid to be the Mr. Very Nice of the Conservative party, but let me stress that under the climate change levy, which is precisely designed to increase renewable energy, any manufacturer who enters into an agreement for pollution reductions gets an 80 per cent. discount. For any manufacturer or other company that is contracting to buy clean electricity there is no impact from the climate change levy.

Of course, as I have said, what manufacturers need is the climate of economic stability that we have created. However, on top of that, and in response to requests from manufacturers, we have put in place the first Government manufacturing strategy that the United Kingdom has had for 30 years. In pursuit of that, we are opening in every region centres for manufacturing excellence that are directly helping manufacturers to be more competitive in these very difficult world conditions.

[Ms Hewitt]

My hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Mrs. Ellman) referred specifically to the importance of science and innovation. It is indeed the investment in our world-class science base, and the commercialisation arising from it, that will form the foundation for prosperity in the future. I particularly welcome, as I know she does, the very successful efforts—led by the North West Development Agency—of the north-west science partnership.

My hon. Friend the Member for Ochil, the hon. Member for Gordon (Malcolm Bruce) and others have referred to the extremely important issues that we face on the energy question. I readily confirm that, with your permission, Mr. Speaker, I will make a statement to the House of Commons before the loan facility that we put in place for British Energy expires at the end of next week. As hon. Members know—I have said this on many previous occasions—the only reason why we extended that financial assistance to British Energy was the overriding priority, and our responsibility in government, of ensuring security of supply and the safety of nuclear generating plants. I shall have more to say on that subject in the statement, just as I will have far more to say—especially in the energy White Paper, which we will publish in the new year—on the important issues raised concerning the operation of the energy market.

The right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe (Mr. Howard) and the hon. Members for Tiverton and Honiton (Mrs. Browning), for Huntingdon (Mr. Djanogly), for North-East Bedfordshire (Alistair Burt), and for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo) raised the question of regulation. The shadow Chancellor was challenged to name three regulations—just three out of the thousands that he is supposedly complaining about—that he would scrap. He had some difficulty, but he finally came up with just one candidate for repeal out of all the thousands that led them to make accusations against us: statutory instrument No. 440. Well, he clearly has not read it. I have had the opportunity to do so, and I shall give him a copy. What he failed to realise is that it is a deregulatory measure. In schedule 2(a), at the heart of this statutory instrument, are the exemptions from requirement to give building notice or to deposit full plans. It is a deregulatory measure—one of several that we have brought forward in government.

It is worth reflecting on this Government's record on regulation. In 1996—

Mrs. Browning: A document published in February, entitled "Realising Europe's Potential: Economic Reform in Europe", lists the next steps for such reform, the second of which is"

"lighter and more targeted regulation".

Can the Secretary of State give us some examples of such regulation?

Ms Hewitt: I have just mentioned the excellent and now very well known statutory instrument No. 440, but I could also mention my right hon. Friend the Chancellor's excellent initiatives on VAT. A radically simplified VAT scheme has cut red tape for 500,000 small businesses, and saved a typical small business up to £1,000 a year. I could also mention that, in 1996, under the Government of which the right hon. and learned Member for Folkestone and Hythe was a member, 230 statutory instruments imposed a cost on business. That has steadily fallen: in 2001, 93 statutory instruments imposed a cost on business.

If the shadow Chancellor would bother to look at all the statutory instruments to which he is so fond of referring, he would realise that a large proportion of them derive directly from the foot and mouth crisis, and only 93 last year imposed costs on business. We have halved the proportion of regulation that imposes any costs on business.

Chris Grayling: As the Secretary of State claims to be in deregulatory mode, will she give a clear undertaking that the agency workers directive will not become law in this country?

Ms Hewitt: We led the way in persuading European Union colleagues to sign up to the better regulation action plan. We are busy negotiating with our EU partners to ensure that they understand the completely different context for agency temporary workers in the United Kingdom, where they are extensively used, to the great benefit of both the workers and the businesses that use them.

Mr. Howard: Will the Secretary of State confirm that if the Government had not signed up to the social chapter, they could have blocked the agency workers directive, whereas now the matter will be decided by majority voting so they cannot block it even if they want to?

Ms Hewitt: The shadow Chancellor did not believe in the minimum wage when we introduced it and refused to say today whether he would be in favour of regular updating. Let me be clear: we are in favour of the social chapter. If he and his party want to continue to be against it, they can make that argument with the British people—but I do not think that the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) will support him in that.

One of my predecessors in this job, a distinguished former Conservative Front Bencher, Lord Heseltine, recently said that one of the reasons why the United Kingdom is one of the best places in the world to do business is the lack of a regulatory climate here. Of course, that judgment is supported by the OECD, *The Economist* intelligence unit and all the benchmarking studies.

Both the shadow Chancellor and the right hon. and learned Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) made great play of taxation, so I want to take this opportunity to put on the table a few facts on the subject. The OECD shows that the United Kingdom remains a relatively lightly taxed economy, with one of the lowest total tax burdens in the European Union, well below the EU average. Conservative Members are very fond of citing the tax burden on business, but the OECD shows that in 2000 it was just over 7 per cent. in Britain, lower than in France, Italy or Germany—lower, indeed, than in 12 European Union countries.

Mr. Kenneth Clarke: I wondered where on earth those figures were coming from, and now the Secretary of

State reveals that they are for 2000. Will she acknowledge that since that time Germany has overtaken us in having a lower tax base—or rather the reverse: Britain has overtaken Germany in having a higher one? The Chancellor has just told us that the Germans are about to put up taxation again, because they, too, have made reckless spending commitments over the past two years. We are now engaging in a race to put up our taxation into the higher levels of the European Union. Germany has forged ahead of us in getting taxes down since the time to which those figures refer.

Ms Hewitt: The right hon. and learned Gentleman is, perhaps uncharacteristically, confused. The German Government announced just today that they are to put up taxes, and the only reason why receipts from business taxation have fallen in Germany is that corporate profitability is on the floor and the German economy is so weak.

The economy is safe in our hands. Under my right hon. Friend the Chancellor, and with the support at least of the hon. Member for Buckingham, whose journey has indeed been an interesting one—so interesting that we look forward to welcoming him to these Benches shortly—we will continue to create the best environment for business in the world.

Debate adjourned.—*[Derek Twigg.]*

Debate to be resumed tomorrow.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Ordered,

That, at the sitting on Thursday 21st November—

(a) notwithstanding the provisions of Standing Order No. 16 (Proceedings under an Act or on European Union documents) the Speaker shall put the questions necessary to dispose of proceedings on the Motion in the name of the Prime Minister relating to Fisheries not later than four hours after their commencement; and

(b) notwithstanding the practice of the House in relation to motions relating to the Committee of Selection, the Motion in the name of Mr Keith Hill relating to the Committee of Selection may be made during the time of public business and the Speaker shall put the questions necessary to dispose of proceedings on it not later than one hour after their commencement,

and proceedings under this Order may continue, though opposed, after the moment of interruption.

Ordered,

That Private Members' Bills shall have precedence over Government business on 31st January and 7th and 28th February and 7th, 14th, 21st and 28th March and 4th April and 16th May and 13th and 20th June and 4th and 11th July 2003.—*[Derek Twigg.]*

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Ordered,

That the Nitrate Vulnerable Zones (Additional Designations) (England) (No. 2) Regulations 2002 (S.I., 2002, No. 2614), be referred to a Standing Committee on Delegated Legislation.—*[Derek Twigg.]*

STANDING COMMITTEE ON THE CONVENTION

Motion made,

That the Order of 12th June 2002 relating to the Standing Committee on the Convention be renewed for the current Session of Parliament, with the omission, in paragraph (4)(b), of the words 'or be counted in the quorum'.—*[Derek Twigg.]*

Hon. Members: Object.

COMMITTEES

Mr. Speaker: With permission, I shall put together the motions relating to the Committee of Selection.

Ordered,

HOME AFFAIRS

That Mr Humfrey Malins and Angela Watkinson be discharged from the Home Affairs Committee and Mr James Clappison and Miss Ann Widdecombe be added to the Committee.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

That Mr Andrew Robathan be discharged from the International Development Committee and Alistair Burt be added to the Committee.—*[Mr. McWilliam, on behalf of the Committee of Selection.]*

Mr. J. Woodbridge

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Derek Twigg.]*

10.1 pm

Dr. Stephen Ladyman (South Thanet): I am grateful for the opportunity to put the case of Mr. J. Woodbridge before the House. As it is complex and reads like the introduction to a John Le Carré novel, I hope that the House will forgive me if I make fairly rapid progress and stick closely to my notes.

The case concerns my constituent, Mr. Jeff Woodbridge of Minster in Thanet. Mr. Woodbridge is an employee of Sigma Enterprises Ltd. of 3 Lion Yard, Clapham. My purpose in bringing the matter to House is threefold: first, to put the extraordinary story on the record, along with my constituent's view of events; secondly, to ensure that Ministers are aware of the way in which consular and other Government services appear to have fallen below the standard that United Kingdom citizens are entitled to expect; and, thirdly, to express my disappointment that when I turned to Ministers for assistance, I did not receive a timely response, so my constituent in turn could not get from his Member of Parliament the support to which he was entitled.

First, let me give the background to the case. Seventeen years ago, a company called Dong Ah was involved in the "Great Man-Made River Project" in Libya—a project to bring water to the desert that at the time had the support of the international community, including the United States of America. Dong Ah purchased hydraulic shears from a US company called Pacific Press for use on the project. That equipment was supplied with the knowledge and support of the US Government.

In September 2001, a German company called BIB approached Pacific Press to acquire spare parts for those hydraulic shears. It is not known—by me at least—who acquired spares for the shears from Pacific Press on behalf of Dong Ah or the Libyans in the intervening period, although it stands to reason that someone must have done so as equipment of that nature would need regular maintenance. BIB was quoted a price of about $7,500, but did not respond until January 2002, when it placed its order and paid for the goods. Having received the money, Pacific Press subsequently reneged on the order, claiming that it would not export the goods directly, but would only supply to some other party in the US. BIB is a small company and it was unable to ignore the loss of the money that it had already paid, so it had to look for a US partner that was prepared to take delivery of the goods on its behalf and export them to Germany for onward shipping to Libya.

That is the point at which Mr. Woodbridge entered the picture. BIB contacted him to ask if he could help, as he trades extensively with the USA. After consulting his employers, it was decided on commercial grounds that Sigma could not directly assist—after all, the goods had already been paid for and there was no way in which the company could earn from the transaction. However, as a service to BIB, which is a valued customer of Sigma, it did agree to put BIB in touch with a company in Miami with which Sigma had dealings and which it thought might be able to help. That company was Minequip, and its president is a Mr. John Clements.

BIB contacted Mr. Clements and asked if he would take delivery of the parts and arrange their export. Mr. Clements accepted the parts from Pacific Press but, on discovering that they would need an export licence, returned them to Pacific Press and declined BIB's request for help. About two months later, out of the blue and for reasons about which I will speculate in a minute, Mr. Clements changed his mind, agreed to accept the parts and asked Sigma if he could ship the parts to them for onward road shipment to Germany as that was the cheapest means of transportation. Mr. Woodbridge and Sigma agreed.

That was the total extent of Mr. Woodbridge's involvement in the affair: first, to pass on to BIB the name of the Miami contact and, secondly, to act as a staging post in the shipment of goods to Germany. Those acts were carried out by a UK company in the UK. Mr. Woodbridge at no time entered into negotiations on US soil. He has not broken any UK laws, and no one, including the DTI, has ever suggested that he has.

VAT and duty were paid on the goods as normal, so it is not realistic to suggest that there was anything clandestine about the arrangements. The parts themselves were for equipment that had been legally supplied by a US company, with the knowledge of the US Government, and which was to be used in an irrigation project. No equipment that is in any way capable of military, terrorist or hostile use was involved.

Despite that, on his next business trip to the US, Mr. Woodbridge was arrested at Minneapolis airport and charged with conspiring to supply the enemy. He spent 10 days in jail until his employers posted $50,000 bail. Mr. Woodbridge was flown to Benton, Illinois to appear before a judge for court appearances to be agreed. When considering future court appearances, the judge said that the case appeared to be a waste of everyone's time; nevertheless, the trial was scheduled for 7 October and subsequently took place on 24 October. On release by the court he was rearrested by US marshals—a decision that led to an argument between the state prosecutor and the US marshals—but released later that day, although he had to remain in the US until his trial.

How were others involved? It appears from information that emerged during the trial that Mr. Clements's telephone was being tapped and he was suspected of criminal activity. It emerged also that Mr. Clements was not, as everyone thought, a naturalised US citizen but a UK citizen and held two passports. One of those passports he used for trips to Cuba, but Cuban visas would not endear him to US immigration officials, so he used a different passport at other times.

We can only speculate that Mr. Clements was offered immunity for other actions, possibly in connection with his trade with Cuba, in return for help with a sting operation against BIB. Hence he unexpectedly reversed his initial decision not to help BIB by exporting the parts from Pacific Press. Although Mr. Clements has been charged in respect of this case, and claims to have been tried and sentenced, the US probation service reports that the case is still pending.

We can only speculate also as to why Pacific Press has not been charged with any offence. During the trial it emerged that the company, or an employee, is also being helpful to the authorities in return either for a reward or for immunity against other charges. Presumably the company, or the employee, notified the authorities of the order in the first place as down payment for whatever consideration it, or he or she, subsequently received.

I turn now to the trial and Mr. Woodbridge's experience of consular services. Throughout his detention in the US, Mr. Woodbridge attempted to get UK officials to help him. He and his employer hoped for diplomatic activity to assist him, but there is no sign that it ever took place. He is diabetic, and he had financial problems caused by having to stay in the US. He hoped that consular officials would offer advice but, in his view, no effective advice was forthcoming. He hoped also that the UK Government would take up the case with the US trade authorities on the ground that the US had acted in an extraterritorial manner, to the detriment of a UK company. He and his employers contacted the DTI.

I have seen e-mail correspondence with a DTI official who deals with extraterritorial issues, and she appears to have had a genuine interest in helping. Mr. Woodbridge's employers met her and other DTI officials, and contact was then made by the DTI with US lawyers who advise the DTI on these issues. The DTI also said that it would contact the British embassy in Washington to ask for its assistance.

Those efforts do not appear to have been followed up. Why? Perhaps a clue can be found in an e-mail erroneously sent to Mr. Woodbridge by another official who was asked for advice as to how the DTI should proceed. When the official realised that the e-mail had been wrongly sent to Mr. Woodbridge he tried to recall it, but it had already been delivered. The e-mail makes it clear that this case has diplomatic and legal implications and advises officials to avoid getting involved.

Mr. Woodbridge e-mailed a strong protest to the author and received a handsome apology. The official made it clear that he did not intend to minimise Mr. Woodbridge's suffering, and he made it clear that he was concerned that officials trying to help may be unfairly implicated in the case and so should proceed with caution. Nevertheless, after that exchange of correspondence, it is hard to escape the conclusion that the risk of involvement was seen as greater than the potential benefits of helping a UK citizen and a UK company.

Mr. Woodbridge also contacted me as his MP, and e-mailed me on 19 August. After making inquiries, I wrote to the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on 21 August. As well as posting those letters, they were faxed to the Ministers' private offices and marked urgent. Receipt was acknowledged by the Foreign Office on 22 August. Several reminders and telephone calls from my office later, a substantive reply was posted from the Foreign Office on 2 October. In other words, an MP's request for help for a constituent unfairly held in a foreign country and suffering from serious health problems did not get a response for over five weeks.

The response from my noble Friend Baroness Amos claimed that consular staff had contacted my constituent's family at the time of arrest and remained in constant touch over the weekend. Mr. Woodbridge and his family have no such memory. The letter claims that consular officials made prison authorities aware of his diabetes and health concerns. Mr. Woodbridge has no such recollection and received no health assistance. The letter, patronisingly I feel, went on to advise me to tell Mr. Woodbridge to seek his own legal advice and provided me with a Foreign Office leaflet on consular services abroad.

An example of the disparity between Baroness Amos's version of events and Mr. Woodbridge's relates to his health care. In her letter of 2 October, the Minister claimed that officials notified prison authorities of his health needs. In reality, after his release, Mr. Woodbridge approached a consular official to explain his need for treatment for diabetes, which she was not aware of, and was told to look in the "Yellow Pages". The Minister's letter was such an abject disappointment that I was loth to give it to Mr. Woodbridge, but I did so at his request. His response was dramatic—he concluded that as his Government had abandoned him he would instruct his lawyers to negotiate a sentence with the prosecution if he pleaded guilty to a crime that he had no knowledge of, had not committed and which was based on legal actions in his own country.

The response from the DTI to my letters was stranger still. It replied more quickly, writing back on 13 September—a delay of three weeks—but the letter from the assistant private secretary said only that it was a matter for the Foreign Office, so my letter had been sent on. The Minister will recollect from what I said earlier that that was the response from the Department that had genuinely tried to help initially. A Minister's office clearly did not even bother to investigate what work officials had undertaken despite the fact that I had supplied it with copies of correspondence showing that the DTI had been involved. Ironically, in the e-mail between a DTI official and his colleague that was wrongly sent to Mr. Woodbridge, the author said that his DTI colleague should not get involved but advise Mr. Woodbridge to contact his MP, who would contact Ministers, who would then instruct officials. But when Mr. Woodbridge did contact his MP, and the MP contacted Ministers, officials batted the letter to the Foreign Office and did not even show it to Ministers. Although my staff contacted that private ministerial office and asked it to look at the case again, I have still have had no response.

In any event, the matter proceeded to trial, and Mr. Woodbridge—his health insurance having run out and having lost all hope of Government intervention—pleaded guilty. Fortunately for him, the trial judge was a man of independent mind. He immediately said that he was not minded to give a custodial sentence—he could have given up to two years—and would tailor his sentence to allow Mr. Woodbridge to return home. Subsequently, he was asked to pay a $7,000 fine and given three years' unsupervised probation. He is now recovering at his home in Minster, although he will never be able to return to the United States.

After Mr. Woodbridge decided to plead guilty, I again wrote to Baroness Amos. She has responded in greater detail giving an account of efforts by consular

[Dr. Stephen Ladyman]

staff to assist, including telephone records to show that consular staff made calls to the UK over the weekend of the arrest. I can only say that the recollection of events by Mr. Woodbridge and his family remains very different from that of those who briefed my noble Friend. For example, in the letter of 2 October, she claims that it was her officials who notified the family of the arrest and in her letter of 4 November cited the phone records to support her case. In fact, the only substantive call to the UK shown on those records was a call that was not initiated by consular officials as my noble Friend implied. It followed a call by Mr. Woodbridge's son, who had by then already heard of his father's arrest from the Minneapolis probation office. It was Mr. Woodbridge's son who first rang the consulate in Chicago to ask if it could help. The officer said that he would investigate and call back, and it was that call that is on the phone records. Worse still, that officer reported that his boss was aware of the arrest, and had intended to leave a report on it, but had gone away for the weekend and forgotten.

I accept that during that phone call Mr. Woodbridge's son told the officer of his father's diabetes and a call was then made to the prison, presumably to relay that fact. Unfortunately, nobody appears to have checked that the US authorities acted on this information—they had not.

I understand that, at times of strain, people may not recall all the various contacts that they have received or even appreciate fully when genuine efforts are being made to help. Certainly they will not know of efforts behind the scenes. The lesson that should be learned in a case such as this is that consular officials should err on the side of overkill in contacting people and always drop them a note to confirm and clarify important issues after the conversation.

Mr. Woodbridge committed no UK crime, and it is still not clear what US authorities suspected was going on. However these events are viewed, the US has acted extraterritorially and the UK Government appear to have allowed them to get away with it. Consular officials and others gave an inadequate service to my constituent, and seem to have acted from the view that he was seeking free legal advice or health care, which he was not. Finally, Ministers' offices acted weakly and deplorably slowly to my request for urgent assistance—more than five weeks for a substantive reply to an MP in a case such as this is unacceptable.

Mr. Woodbridge realised that the Government could not get involved in the US judicial system; he did not expect us to send a gunboat to release him. He did however expect sympathy, support, clear advice and possibly some help through diplomatic channels. As his MP, I did not expect us to break off relations with the United States or the Prime Minister to pick up the hotline to President Bush, but I did expect a thorough and proactive response to a serious situation. I fear that we were both let down.

My hon. Friend the Minister will in his response not wish to be too critical of his officers, and I fully understand that. I just hope that in private, in the next day or two, someone in the Foreign Office will read my remarks, look hard at what happened and have thoughts on what should have happened.

10.16 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Mike O'Brien): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for South Thanet (Dr. Ladyman) on securing this Adjournment debate and on bringing the case to the attention of the House and those who read *Hansard*.

I have no doubt that the past few months have been a very stressful and difficult time for Mr. Woodbridge and his family. I welcome this opportunity to discuss the response of Her Majesty's Government in the months leading up to his conviction and departure from the United States.

I should say at the outset that I accept that we did make mistakes in this case. We must apologise for three in particular. First and foremost, we should have replied much more quickly to my hon. Friend's original letter requesting our help. Secondly, the Department of Trade and Industry and the Foreign Office should have been more joined up in our work on the case. Finally, we should have communicated more effectively with Mr. Woodbridge about the work that the Government were doing on his behalf, and then followed it up with him after his release from jail to ensure his health requirements were being looked after. I shall address each of those issues in due course, but first I should like to say something about what we did do for Mr. Woodbridge.

Mr. Woodbridge was arrested on 18 July 2002 in Minneapolis, Minnesota. His case was not brought to our attention until the following day when his lawyer contacted our honorary consul in Minneapolis. By that time, the authorities had already contacted Mr. Woodbridge's family, and his employer had in turn arranged for a lawyer. If we had been notified sooner of his arrest by the local authorities, we would have arranged, if Mr. Woodbridge had wished, for his family to be informed. Our staff members can make contact with next of kin only after they have been informed of an arrest. In this case, the United States authorities failed to notify us before notifying Mr. Woodbridge's family.

After speaking with Mr. Woodbridge's lawyer on 19 July, the honorary consul alerted the duty officer in Chicago, which is our nearest consulate. The duty officer in Chicago tried several times to speak to Mr. Woodbridge directly, but the US authorities refused permission. Although it was not an ideal situation and consular officials would have preferred to speak to Mr. Woodbridge directly, the duty officer received assurances of Mr. Woodbridge's well-being from his lawyer as well as from staff at the jail. We have since complained to the US State Department regarding that denial of access.

The duty officer then contacted Mr. Woodbridge's son Andrew. It was through the contact with Andrew Woodbridge that the duty officer learned that Mr. Woodbridge has dietary diabetes. Mr. Woodbridge may dispute this, but the duty officer immediately alerted prison authorities to his medical condition. I am told by officials that there are telephone records from Chicago to support that communication. In addition, the duty officer was told of claims by jail authorities that Mr. Woodbridge himself would have had an opportunity to inform them of his medical condition at the time that he was taken into custody.

On 19 July, the consulate was informed by the US Customs Service that Mr. Woodbridge was to be charged with conspiracy involving the export of US goods to Libya. The authorities planned to transfer him to the jurisdiction of the Federal district court of the southern district of Illinois, where the goods were manufactured. Around that time, Mr. Woodbridge's employer contacted our honorary consul in Minneapolis, where Mr. Woodbridge was being held. The employer sought our honorary consul's advice as to where to engage legal counsel for Mr. Woodbridge—Illinois, where the case was likely to be heard, or Minneapolis, where Mr. Woodbridge was initially being held.

The honorary consul used his personal network of contacts to arrange a conference call between himself, the former US Attorney for Minnesota, and the former US Attorney in the central district of Illinois, both leading private legal practitioners. He gathered their views and passed them on Mr. Woodbridge's employer. Here, the honorary consul was extremely helpful in using his access to those lawyers to get free advice for Mr. Woodbridge.

On 23 July, Mr. Woodbridge went before the court in Minneapolis and bail was set at $50,000. His employer paid the bond on 30 July and Mr. Woodbridge was released. On 5 August, Mr. Woodbridge contacted our consulate in Chicago and informed staff there that he was living at his employer's expense in southern Illinois and had retained local counsel.

During his telephone call, Mr. Woodbridge asked whether the consulate could recommend a doctor specialising in diabetes. Unfortunately, although we maintain doctors lists in some places in some countries, I regret to say that we do not do so for many countries in which health care is generally good and readily available, such as the United States, nor do we generally maintain doctors lists for very small municipalities, such as the one in which Mr. Woodbridge was residing. The vice-consul, therefore, advised Mr. Woodbridge to seek a referral at the nearest hospital. The vice-consul also suggested that Mr. Woodbridge might consult the local yellow pages where doctors are listed by speciality. I know that Mr. Woodbridge found this approach unsatisfactory.

On 17 August, Mr. Woodbridge sent an e-mail to the Department of Trade and Industry. I must say that the Government failed Mr. Woodbridge twice with respect to that communication. First, a DTI employee intercepted Mr. Woodbridge's message and forwarded it to a colleague, along with his opinion that the issues raised by the case were best left to Mr. Woodbridge's legal team. He advised that the DTI should not get involved. Unfortunately, the employee mistakenly sent his reply not only to his colleagues at the DTI, but to Mr. Woodbridge. He apologised to Mr. Woodbridge the next day. The entire incident was wrong and I accept that it should not have happened. I apologise to Mr. Woodbridge for what happened.

The second failure came when the same e-mail was forwarded to the Foreign Office under cover of a letter from my honourable Friend. We took far too long to respond to that letter, part of the time being spent co-ordinating our response with the DTI. I regret very much that that happened. However, Mr. Woodbridge was already on bail and living in his apartment in Illinois at the time of his first writing. Our tardiness, inexcusable though it was, had no bearing on Mr. Woodbridge's situation.

On 27 August, DTI officials met Mr. Woodbridge's employer and contacted the embassy in Washington. The DTI wanted to investigate whether the US may have acted extraterritorially in its pursuit of Mr. Woodbridge. In addition to seeking advice from the Department's lawyers, the DTI also asked the embassy to seek legal advice from US lawyers specialising in export control laws and extraterritoriality. Following that, officials at the embassy contacted Mr. Woodbridge's lawyer and the US Department of Commerce to discuss their detailed concerns. On the basis of these discussions, and on the advice of DTI and US lawyers, the DTI decided on 6 September that US actions were not extraterritorial. I know that there is some disagreement about that, but that is certainly the position that the DTI reached. Therefore, the Government would be unable to intervene. Mr. Woodbridge and his employer were informed the same day.

Dr. Ladyman: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way. Mr. Woodbridge's company would never have even been involved at that stage if Minequip had not specifically asked for the goods to be shipped via Sigma. It seems most likely that Minequip was asked to do that by the US authorities, which wanted to implicate not only BIB, but Sigma. Surely, that is evidence of extraterritorial behaviour.

Mr. O'Brien: I recognise that my hon. Friend has a view about that. No doubt, Mr. Woodbridge's lawyers also have a view. All I can say is that we have taken legal advice and have an alternative view about where the law stands. Our view remains that the US actions were not extraterritorial. While I accept some of what he says about the behaviour of Mr. Woodbridge not being unlawful in this country, the situation is somewhat different in the US context. Our view was that the US actions were not extraterritorial and were lawful in the context of US law. Therefore, we were not in a position to intervene. Our consular staff were not fully aware of all the discussions at the time, however, and I accept that the Government could have been more joined up in addressing the issue.

Since then, officials have spoken to Mr. Woodbridge several times. On 8 November, he pleaded guilty to the charges against him and received three years' probation. It was stipulated in the plea agreement that Mr. Woodbridge depart the United States voluntarily by 13 November.

I am aware that Mr. Woodbridge is not happy with the way in which his case has been handled. We are always disappointed when that is the case and we aim to provide an effective consular service. The main role of the consul is to advise on local practice and ensure that UK national detainees are treated no worse than nationals from the country in which they are held.

Mr. Woodbridge was convicted of a crime in the United States, and as far as we can ascertain, his treatment was no worse than that which an American would have received in the same circumstances. As I said, there were certainly things that I would change

[Mr. O'Brien]

about the way in which we handled the case. I am concerned about the time that it took to respond to Mr. Woodbridge's initial e-mail from my hon. Friend and about the fact that we should have been more joined up with the DTI in our various roles. Most especially, I regret very much that Mr. Woodbridge thinks that the Government did not care about him or his case.

There is clearly a limit to what consular staff can do in particular cases and circumstances. There are a limited number of staff and often a large number of demands. Sometimes, expectations are greater than can be delivered in practice, but in this case, I am satisfied that in some respects, although not all, the response was not all that I would have hoped for. Substantial help was given to Mr. Woodbridge in the handling of the case and a number of officials did their best to be as helpful to him as possible. However, in other instances, the response was not all that he had a right to demand from his Government. That is why I have set out clearly our apologies where we felt them appropriate. I hope that Mr. Woodbridge will feel that that is the sort of response that he would have expected. Where we have got it wrong, we have apologised and where we feel that the criticisms have been harsh, I hope that we have given an explanation.

Dr. Ladyman: I am very grateful to my hon. Friend for offering that apology to Mr. Woodbridge. I think that it was the right thing to do and it is very magnanimous of him to do it on the Government's behalf. The one piece of advice that I might offer, if he does not mind, is that during that five weeks when I was waiting for a response, if somebody had picked up the telephone and said, "We are working on it and doing our best", an awful lot of the problems could have been headed off.

Mr. O'Brien: I am sure that my hon. Friend is entirely right. All I would say is that most officials are doing their best throughout the working day, and they work enormously hard under a great deal of stress and pressure. Sometimes, the stress and the pile of work can mean that the sort of telephone call to which he referred is not made, and I appreciate that in individual cases such this one, there can be a price to be paid by the constituent.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at half-past Ten o'clock.

House of Commons

Tuesday 19 November 2002

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

TRANSPORT

The Secretary of State was asked—

Potters Bar Rail Crash

1. **Mr. Henry Bellingham** (North-West Norfolk): When he next expects to meet representatives of the Health and Safety Executive to discuss progress on the report on the Potters Bar rail crash. [81309]

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Alistair Darling): Regular meetings are held with the Health and Safety Commission and members of the Health and Safety Executive to discuss railway safety matters, which include progress on the investigation of the Potters Bar derailment. The next meeting has been arranged for next week.

Mr. Bellingham: As the Secretary of State will know, the WAGN train on 10 May was en route to my constituency. Many of my constituents were on the train, although thankfully only one was seriously injured.

We saw the HSE's preliminary report in July. Since then, unnamed officials have speculated that some of the stretcher bars did not have self-locking nuts. Other officials have speculated that Jarvis may well be charged with corporate manslaughter. There is considerable confusion. The crash happened six months ago; why have we not seen the final report? Surely it is for the Secretary of State to announce that a full public inquiry will take place.

Mr. Darling: I have made it clear that once I have the HSE's final report I will decide whether that is appropriate. The HSE is expected to produce its third interim report in the spring, and I am informed that it is likely to deal with most of the outstanding matters.

The hon. Gentleman will appreciate that, as is right, I cannot control or influence the criminal investigation. Unfortunately, a large amount of information must be gathered and processed before the prosecuting authorities can make their decision. I share the hon. Gentleman's frustration at the length of time it is taking to complete not just the Potters Bar investigation but the Hatfield and Paddington inquiries. He can rest assured that I will do all I can to bring the process to a conclusion, certainly in relation to matters for which I am responsible.

Mr. Kelvin Hopkins (Luton, North): I am told that the Potters Bar points were due to be relaid over the weekend of 9 and 10 November, but that following an intervention by the Health and Safety Executive the job was cancelled, although it had been paid for. Is it not the case that Jarvis cannot now be trusted to work on our railways, and is it not time to return all such work to public ownership and accountability to the House?

Mr. Darling: My hon. Friend is not entirely right about the Potters Bar points. It is true that their replacement was planned for the weekend of 9 and 10 November, but Network Rail itself decided, sensibly in my view, not to proceed because of the HSE's outstanding concerns, and for other reasons. The work will be done.

As for maintenance generally, my hon. Friend will know that in September the then Railtrack announced that a large amount of its work would be brought back and, if not in house, would certainly be done by people employed directly by contractors. The key issue, as I have always said, is that one organisation—which is now Network Rail—must be responsible for when work is done and what is done, and, above all, for ensuring that it is carried out successfully. That process is now under way, and should be complete by 2004.

Mr. Don Foster (Bath): How can the public be assured that the lessons of the Potters Bar crash will be learned, when 68 important safety recommendations made after previous rail crashes have either not been implemented on time or apparently sunk without trace? When will the Secretary of State tell the House which of the recommendations he intends to abandon or revise, and what he is doing to speed up the implementation of the rest?

Mr. Darling: The vast bulk of the recommendations made by both Lord Cullen and Professor Uff following the Paddington and Southall accidents have been, or are on the way to being, implemented.

The hon. Gentleman is right. Some issues, such as whether the European train protection warning systems should be fitted, are under discussion. When evidence was given to Lord Cullen, he was led to believe that there was an advanced European system that could be incorporated on our railways, but unfortunately it turns out that the system he had in mind does not work on any railway anywhere in Europe. It makes sense to evaluate systems to establish whether they would work, and whether they could be adapted for our railway system.

The hon. Gentleman—indeed, the whole House—is understandably concerned about the fact that it is taking longer than expected to implement the recommendations. I am anxious to ensure that as many as possible are implemented wherever that is practicable, but if events have overtaken some recommendations it is sensible for us to consider whether further adaptations are necessary. The chief objective of the entire industry is to make certain that we have a safe railway system.

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge): Is my right hon. Friend aware that on the Cambridge-London line, which includes the Potters Bar points where the tragic accident took place, the service has declined sharply over the past two weeks? When members of the public ask, for instance, why there is an emergency timetable at weekends, they are told that it is because of emergency work on the Potters Bar points. Will my right hon. Friend investigate, and establish why such bad service is being given to commuters in my constituency?

Mr. Darling: My hon. Friend will have heard what I said earlier to my hon. Friend the Member for Luton, North (Mr. Hopkins) about the points, but she is right: work is proceeding not just in that stretch of line but on all stretches, particularly at weekends, to bring the line up to scratch. The problem that we face is that we have had decades after decades of lack of investment in railway lines. The investment is now available. We are having to do a lot of work fairly quickly. Inevitably, that leads to some disruption. It is not the only reason for delays on that stretch of line. There have been problems recently, as those who travel on the east coast main line to Cambridge will know, but it is inevitable that as major renewal work is carried out there will be some disruption. However, I hope that hon. Members on both sides of the House will agree that what is important is that the work is done and, critically, that it is done properly.

Mr. Tim Collins (Westmorland and Lonsdale): Given that rail safety, as the Secretary of State has said, is hugely dependent on the role of Network Rail, can he tell the House whether he stands by the statement in his party conference speech that

"The fundamental difference with Network Rail is that it will be publicly owned"?

Mr. Darling: It is a public interest company, as we have always made clear. The company is owned by its members.

Mr. Collins: The Secretary of State will know that the Office for National Statistics, saying it is acting on advice from his Department, has classified Network Rail as "a private sector institution". He will further know that the city analyst Standard and Poor said yesterday that confusion over the Government's relationship with Network Rail could cost the taxpayer £2.5 billion a year, money that could otherwise be invested in improving rail safety and passenger delivery.

Mr. Speaker: Order. That does not have a lot to do with Potters Bar.

Air Services

2. **Malcolm Bruce** (Gordon): What plans he has to publish the Aviation White Paper. [81310]

3. **Mr. Bill Tynan** (Hamilton, South): What discussions he has had with the Scottish Executive regarding the future development of airports in Scotland. [81311]

9. **Richard Burden** (Birmingham, Northfield): If he will make a statement on the options for the development of air services in the Midlands. [81331]

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Alistair Darling): We will publish our air transport White Paper next year. It will set out a clear policy framework for aviation and airports in the UK for the next 30 years.

Malcolm Bruce: I am grateful to the Secretary of State for his answer. Does he accept that in Scotland the proposal for a central Scotland airport has probably been resurrected every 10 years for the past 50 years? Does he agree that it is an unhelpful proposal and that what we need is to ensure that our airports are properly developed and supported? What can he do to ensure that we get more international flights, cheaper fares and less penal surcharges on holiday flights out of airports such as Aberdeen?

Mr. Darling: The key issue in Scotland, especially central Scotland, is how we can do more to attract international flights. The consultation paper asked whether Edinburgh, Glasgow or both airports should be promoted to achieve that end. There is a proposal from a group of mainly business men in central Scotland, which, as the hon. Gentleman says, has resurrected the idea of building a new airport, probably near Falkirk; I think that it is actually 25 years ago since the proposal was previously discussed.

The whole point of the consultation is to look at the various options. The Government have put forward some. No doubt during the consultation others will come forward and we will want to look at them. At this stage, however, it would not be right for me to discourage people from looking at options that are different from the ones that the Government have come up with. They all need to be looked at, bearing in mind that we intend to publish our proposals next year, as I made clear when I made my statement in July.

Mr. Tynan: Is my right hon. Friend aware of the considerable concern in Scotland that expansion of airports would apply only to either Glasgow or Edinburgh? Will he commit himself to ensuring that in any future discussion the case for both airports to be upgraded will be made? If not, why not?

Mr. Darling: I am aware of the debate, understandably. The whole point of the consultation was to ask people to what extent they thought demand would rise and how we should meet that demand. The Government have not at this stage reached a conclusion as to which or indeed whether airports should be extended. In relation to both Edinburgh and Glasgow, the consultation document makes it clear that it is unlikely that either of those airports would need another runway for at least 15 to 20 years, although they would probably both need changes to their terminal buildings.

However, the whole point of a consultation is to seek views and to enable the Government to come to a conclusion, which we will do next year.

Richard Burden: My right hon. Friend will know of the widespread opposition in the west midlands to the proposal for a new airport around Rugby, but he will also be aware that there is broad understanding of the important role already played by Birmingham international airport, which is bringing over £190 million into the regional economy. The issue is how Birmingham can realise its potential while protecting the environment. I wonder whether he has considered Birmingham's new proposal for a shorter, wide-spaced runway, and how that could fit into the consultation procedure.

Mr. Darling: I am aware of the position regarding the proposal to build a new airport in the midlands. Indeed, at our party conference I wandered through a large crowd of demonstrators and then realised exactly who they were, so I am in no doubt as to what they thought.

As I said just a moment ago, the consultation period finishes at the end of this month. We will then have the Birmingham proposals before us, which we will need to look at. As I have made clear on several occasions, next year we will publish a White Paper on our final views as to what development is necessary, and where it ought to take place.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York): The consultation process is flawed, as the Secretary of State must agree. In Scotland, we do not know whether it is he or the Scottish Executive who are going to take the decision. In England, the process has been seriously flawed. Documents were not available, and nor were any Ministers. Will the Secretary of State agree at least to a two-month extension of the consultation process in England, to allow all views to be heard? Will he deny the front-page story in *Sunday Business*, which claims that the decision to build a second runway at Stansted has already been taken?

Mr. Darling: As I have said, no decisions have been taken, but I should say that I do not accept the hon. Lady's central point. Many people have said that they want the uncertainty brought to an end as quickly as possible. In my statement in July, I said that in my view it would be in the interests of everyone concerned if the Government could reach their conclusions and publish their White Paper in the first part of next year, and that remains my view. It would not be in anyone's interest to stretch out the process in the way that the hon. Lady suggests—indeed, far from it. The distinct impression that I get from most of the people concerned is that they would like a decision to be made as quickly as possible, so that we can get on and develop those airports where that is necessary, and remove uncertainty from areas where we have decided not to develop.

Mr. Mark Prisk (Hertford and Stortford): Given the rising opposition to inland airports in the south-east, particularly at Stansted, can the Secretary of State confirm that he is still prepared to consider other options in the south-east—for example, an offshore airport in the Thames estuary?

Mr. Darling: I have made it clear that I am willing to consider any reasonable proposition, but the hon. Gentleman should bear in mind that as the Government are not in the business of building airports—they will be built by the private sector—it would be necessary for someone to come forward with a proposal to build one in the Thames estuary. As I have pointed out, if people have better alternatives and other proposals, this is precisely the time that they should be presenting them.

Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock): Can I tell the Secretary of State that the consultation process is flawed, and that the consultation period should be extended? When he goes back to his Department, I want him to ask to see the file on the consultation for Thurrock, which is spitting distance from the proposed airport at Cliffe. There has been no consultation by his Department, no money has been spent, and there have been no public meetings in Thurrock, yet had the Almighty not put the Thames in the way, we would be cheek by jowl with Cliffe.

Mr. Darling: The consultation is open to everyone in this country, no matter where they live. It is not a matter of spending money, as my hon. Friend claims. It is perfectly possible for him, his constituents and everyone else to make representations. *[Interruption.]* I have made it abundantly clear that it is open to everyone to make representations, and that is precisely what I would like them to do.

Pete Wishart (North Tayside): I am very surprised that the Secretary of State made no reference to the extra £6 million of spending announced yesterday by the Scottish Executive. Will he ensure that this money is used to secure these new international routes, and not squandered on the quite outrageous subsidies and landing charges that are imposed by the British Airports Authority? Will he go further and look at the whole issue of landing charges in Scotland and BAA's virtual monopoly and stranglehold on Scottish airports, and ensure that this tax is no longer applied to them?

Mr. Darling: In relation to the money announced yesterday by the Scottish Executive, I should have thought that the hon. Gentleman would be the last person to urge me to intervene in a decision that has been properly devolved to Scotland. I know that the nationalists can be confused at times, but this is the sort of confusion that we do not normally come across.

On the British Airports Authority, if the hon. Gentleman wants to make representations, he can do so. The central question that faces Scotland is what we can do to attract more international flights to a greater range of destinations. In my experience, that is overwhelmingly the wish of the people of Scotland and I commend him to concentrate his mind on that rather than urging me to overrule the Scottish Executive, which, in any event, I cannot do.

Geraint Davies (Croydon, Central): Residents in Croydon are concerned at the stacking of aircraft above

Biggin hill and the subsequent low-level flying over Croydon into London. Will my right hon. Friend confirm that airspace capacity and its management will be included in the consultation that ends next week and whether National Air Traffic Services will be consulted and its views on managing airspace be made public?

Mr. Darling: My hon. Friend may be reassured to know that as part of the exercise, the national air traffic control system has to decide how capacity can be accommodated and what are the best routes for aircraft. There is one point that he might want to bear in mind, which is that part of the reason for the number of aircraft that are circling around London in stacks is the limitations in airport capacity. If we can deal with that, we can begin to deal with some of the problems caused by circling aircraft, whether over Croydon or anywhere else.

Mr. John Taylor (Solihull): Will the right hon. Gentleman accept from me that the wide spaced second Birmingham runway option is mayhem to the residents in the east of my constituency; and the airport's own proposals are at best mayhem minus one? Will he realise that those people right now face blight without compensation?

Mr. Darling: On the latter point, it is precisely for that reason that I have rejected calls from the hon. Gentleman's Front Bench colleagues to prolong the period of consultation. I am well aware of the fact that there are mixed views in Birmingham, just as there are in other parts of the country. It is far better that we hear those views, evaluate them and come to a decision as quickly as is reasonably possible, having taken into account all the representations that have been made. That suggests to me that we should make our decisions sooner and certainly not put off the situation for several months.

Mr. Iain Luke (Dundee, East): When the aviation White Paper is published will my right hon. Friend ensure that it addresses not only the issues involving the national airports covered by BAA, but considers the needs of the smaller regional and local airports such as mine in Dundee to ensure that they are able to get more direct flights to London and European destinations?

Mr. Darling: The White Paper will cover airports in general, and the consultation papers cover all airports in the United Kingdom. It is necessary for us to get a view about how to make better use of the small regional airports. I am aware of the importance of Dundee airport to that city. There is no reason why airports such as Dundee, or local councils or anyone else, should not make representations as we formulate our national airport strategy, which will cover the next 20 or 30 years.

David Burnside (South Antrim): Will the Secretary of State widen the rather narrow national terms of reference of the aviation White Paper? How can the United Kingdom work out an airport and aviation policy for the future when almost every airline and every airport in every European state receive either federal or state subsidies, whereas the United Kingdom has a free enterprise airline system and the majority of our airports do not receive public sector funds? How do we widen the context to show the Government's failure to stop the unfair subsidies being given to our European competitors?

Mr. Darling: I am not sure what view the hon. Gentleman is taking, although I believe that he knows something about the airline industry because I seem to remember that his previous occupation had something to do with one of Britain's large airlines. We do not believe that the Government should be in the business of propping up or maintaining airlines or air industries that would not be able to exist otherwise. I know that within Europe there are varying degrees of subsidies, but our vision of the future is that airlines ought to be able to operate on a commercial basis, and that is the central objective of our policy.

Congestion Charging and Parking

5. **Clive Efford** (Eltham): If he will make a statement on the ability of the DVLA to provide adequate information to support congestion charging and parking enforcement. [81312]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. David Jamieson): I am confident that the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency fulfils its obligation to supply vehicle and keeper information to support congestion charging and parking enforcement. The DVLA and Transport for London have conducted extensive tests to support congestion charging and I understand that TfL are satisfied with the accuracy of the information supplied.

Clive Efford: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer. Does he agree that the success or failure of charging schemes should be judged on the schemes themselves, not on the failure of any other organisation? I congratulate him on the work that he has done in the past year to improve the efficiency of the DVLA, but does he agree that we need it to be efficient to ensure the smooth exchange of information between the enforcement agencies and to target those people who provide false information and try to avoid paying vehicle excise duty?

Mr. Jamieson: My hon. Friend has raised his legitimate concerns about that issue in the Chamber and in the Transport Committee. In the practical trials that TfL has undertaken with the DVLA, TfL has been very satisfied with the quality of the data that it has received from the DVLA. TfL will follow up by other means those people who try to avoid the congestion charge. My hon. Friend will also be aware that the Vehicle Crimes Act 2001 introduced a system of continuous registration, which will give great encouragement and incentive to people who sell or dispose of a vehicle to ensure that the address of a new keeper is passed on. That will further improve the quality of the records.

Richard Ottaway (Croydon, South): Does the Minister accept that the London congestion charging

scheme, which includes the areas of Vauxhall and Bermondsey, is a regressive tax that will hit the lowest paid hardest?

Mr. Jamieson: No.

Sir Sydney Chapman (Chipping Barnet): The Minister will know that the mayor is given draconian powers to impound and, if necessary, sell vehicles that regularly avoid the congestion charge. Does he agree with those powers and, if so, should not those powers be extended to other London boroughs and local authorities to deal with those drivers who regularly avoid paying charges by using false number plates or giving false names?

Mr. Jamieson: Any powers that have been given to the mayor have been given to him by this Parliament. The DVLA follows up people who persistently do not pay the licence fee. As he will know, in a scheme in his area we have been identifying some of those vehicles and, if necessary, confiscating and crushing them. Those powers are available to the DVLA and the quality of the information that is now provided to local authorities will help them to take swifter action against abandoned cars, which are a problem in almost every constituency.

Transport Projects (Financing)

6. **Mrs. Patsy Calton** (Cheadle): What recent discussions he has had with the Treasury regarding the financing of transport projects in the United Kingdom. [81313]

The Minister for Transport (Mr. John Spellar): The Secretary of State regularly discusses the financing of UK transport projects with the Treasury.

Mrs. Calton: I thank the Minister for that brief answer. What steps is he taking to ensure the effective monitoring of work and expenditure in projects such as the west coast main line, in order to avoid a future fiasco such as the failure to deliver passenger upgrade 1 and passenger upgrade 2?

Mr. Spellar: The hon. Lady rightly identifies the chronic failure of Railtrack to deliver on the west coast main line. That is why we had to put the company into administration, why Network Rail had to be created and why the work has now been transferred to Network Rail under a much more professional management. I thank her for her tribute to the work that we have undertaken in that regard.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): Is my right hon. Friend aware that an 11-strong team in the Treasury is now apparently taking transport decisions? It is suggested that an arrangement is being reached between his Department and the Treasury on several major financing projects. In future, who will be responsible for such transport projects?

Mr. Spellar: It will, of course, be the Department of Transport, as part of collective responsibility. Given the considerable investment that is required by and being put into transport, it would be extraordinary if discussions did not take place between the finance Department and the relevant Department about how to operate the programme. Not least, we will be looking at a number of special-purpose vehicles in the rail industry, as my hon. Friend will be aware. In addition, the ongoing public-private partnerships are significant in financial terms. I am sure that my hon. Friend would agree that such discussions were right and proper, and that the Transport Committee, which she chairs, would be asking questions if we were not involved in them.

Mr. Peter Lilley (Hitchin and Harpenden): Has the Minister asked the Treasury whether it plans to finance the new runway that he assumes will be built at Luton airport? Is he aware that my constituents will be severely affected by plans to expand Luton airport to the size of Gatwick airport? They are extremely angry that his report on the matter is unique in assuming that there will be a new runway at Luton, whereas all other new runway projects are treated as optional. Will he promise to give my constituents' concerns treatment equal to that given to the concerns of all other people living near airports?

Mr. Spellar: Two issues are involved in that question. One has to do with the options in connection with airports, including Luton airport. The other has to do with the financing of the consequences of any decision. The local community has given the proposed expansion of Luton airport very considerable support. *[Interruption.]* Perhaps the people of Luton are looking forward to the jobs that will be created, in contrast to the not-in-my-back-yard position adopted by some Opposition Members. Luton residents have shown considerable support for the project.

However, the proposal regarding Luton airport is being put up for consultation in the same way that all the other options are. We wait to hear the views of the constituents of the right hon. Member for Hitchin and Harpenden (Mr. Lilley) and other hon. Members on that option, and the views of the wider community, industry and trade unions. We look forward to receiving the right hon. Gentleman's representations on the matter.

As the right hon. Gentleman also knows—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Minister's answer is too long.

Mr. George Howarth (Knowsley, North and Sefton, East): When my right hon. Friend meets Treasury colleagues, will he urge them to speed up their consideration of the Merseytravel proposal for the first phase of a tram scheme that would provide a service to my constituency? Will he impress on them that the objective 1 element of the funding could be lost if they do not hurry up?

Mr. Spellar: My hon. Friend and his Merseyside colleagues have made that point forcibly before, to me and to other transport Ministers, and to Treasury Ministers. We have had some constructive discussions

with the Mersey passenger transport executive and authority, and we hope to make an announcement in the near future.

Mr. Archie Norman (Tunbridge Wells): May I remind the Minister that he was due to meet me and a number of other hon. Members this morning in Tunbridge Wells to discuss improvements to the A21 route to Hastings? Is the £32 million financing for improvements to the Castle Hill stretch in place? Will that scheme be delivered, subject to local consultation, and when will it finally be built?

Mr. Spellar: As the hon. Gentleman is aware, I had to go directly to Hastings today, where I was pleased to announce that work on the Lamberhurst bypass will commence in spring 2003. I also announced the opening of the exhibition showing the options for the route to Lamberhurst that connects the two stretches of dual carriageway, and for the route from Lamberhurst south to Hastings. The options are now out for consultation, and we await feedback from the public. We will then have discussions with the various statutory bodies involved to determine whether any planning inquires will be required. We look forward to the work being undertaken, because as the hon. Gentleman and I both know, the road is dangerous. It is also very important for regeneration in Hastings.

London Underground (Crime)

7. **Mr. Tom Cox** (Tooting): How many crimes have been committed on the London Underground in each of the last three years. [81329]

The Minister for Transport (Mr. John Spellar): British Transport police recorded a total of 23,410 offences in the London Underground area during 1999–2000, 19,322 during 2000–01 and 18,230 during 2001–02. That reduction of more than a fifth in recorded offences reflects the success of the police's efforts, in partnership with London Underground, to tackle crime on the tube.

Mr. Cox: I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply. I am sure that he and the whole House will accept that there is still a serious problem of crime on the London underground. The activities of pickpockets are a particular problem, as a number of my constituents who travel by underground have sadly discovered recently. As it is the period leading up to Christmas and the new year, when people often travel with a large amount of money and a great many possessions, could not the police and the authorities that run London Underground embark on a campaign to bring to the attention of the travelling public the real dangers from crime on the London underground?

Mr. Spellar: London Underground and the British Transport police have co-ordinated a campaign called Operation Jackdaw, which is a crime reduction programme aimed at catching pickpockets and educating customers about the dangers of pickpocketing and mobile phone theft. They are also working on antisocial behaviour orders to remove some of the worst offenders from the network, so that they do not have the opportunity to reoffend.

Derek Conway (Old Bexley and Sidcup): Is the Minister aware that my constituents from Bexley who have to use the London underground not out of choice but out of economic necessity are concerned about the level of crime? Will he use his powers to encourage the British Transport police to have a greater presence, so that single women, in particular, who travel on the tube at difficult times of the day see a uniformed presence to put off the 20,000-odd people who feel that they are—and seem to be—getting away with it?

Mr. Spellar: The hon. Gentleman should note that the figure is down to 18,000. That is too many, but we are bearing down heavily on those people. There has also been a considerable increase in closed circuit television coverage, which has aided and abetted the work of the police. The British Transport police have increased the number of regular officers employed in the London underground from 402 in 1999–2000 to 452. They are also working effectively with the Metropolitan police on the trains and in station surrounds, where ticket touting is a menace. That is a good example of joined-up policing and co-operation between London Underground and those two police forces, and it is having an effect.

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham): Does the Minister agree that the problem of crime on London transport is even greater on single-crew buses? Drivers have to cope on their own with assault, robbery and vandalism. What plans does he have to enhance security?

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is changing the subject.

Mr. Christopher Chope (Christchurch): The Minister will not get away with his complacent responses on this issue. Every day more than 50 crimes are committed on the London underground. Is it any wonder that Miss Moneypenny and other actresses and key opinion formers in London are convinced that the imposition of the congestion charge in London is unfair, because it will force the vulnerable to go on the tube when they would prefer to travel by car?

Mr. Spellar: I hope that the hon. Gentleman listened to my earlier replies. I said that there has been a greater police presence, a substantial reduction in crime and co-operation with the Metropolitan police. One of the areas that women in particular are concerned about at night is station surrounds and the journey between the station and the car park. All those problems are being addressed, and we are having some success. I am only sorry that he cannot welcome that, because it is good news for the travelling public, especially the vulnerable.

Bus Quality

8. **Judy Mallaber** (Amber Valley): If he will make a statement on the progress of bus quality partnerships. [81330]

The Minister for Transport (Mr. John Spellar): Quality bus partnerships are helping to attract more people to public transport by improving the quality of local bus services. A survey undertaken for my Department recorded that 134 voluntary quality bus partnership agreements were in place in England and Wales in 2001. Some authorities are actively considering statutory quality bus partnership schemes as part of their bus strategies.

Judy Mallaber: I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply. Outside my constituency office, wheelchair users can now board scheduled buses to Nottingham because of investment by Trent Buses and four local councils in low-boarding buses and boarding platforms. A range of action by the partnership, including improving Alfreton bus station, which my right hon. Friend visited earlier this year, has increased the number of passengers using buses by 10 per cent. Will he give an assurance that funding will continue to be maintained to existing bus partnerships that are successful as well as extending them elsewhere? Will he also join me in regretting—

Mr. Speaker: Order. That is too many questions. Only one supplementary is allowed.

Mr. Spellar: I certainly join my hon. Friend the Member for Amber Valley (Judy Mallaber) in regretting the action of Amber Valley council, which I think that she wanted to mention, in moving away from the quality bus partnership. The key issue that we need to address is real partnership between local authorities and the bus companies for the benefit of the travelling public. There has been an increase of about 10 per cent. on the route that she mentioned, which is certainly good news for those who use the buses and it is also a significant contribution to achieving the shift from car to bus use that we are all trying to achieve.

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire): Does the Minister agree that an important part of quality bus partnerships is the proper use of bus lanes? Will he join me in condemning the activities of his right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary, who abused the bus lane to avoid a traffic jam that was created by his friend Ken Livingstone?

Mr. Spellar: I am certainly glad to hear that an Opposition Member supports bus lanes and we shall certainly note that for the future.

Mr. Bill O'Brien (Normanton): In considering quality bus partnerships, will my right hon. Friend impress on bus companies the importance of provision for disabled—especially wheelchair-bound—people and the elderly to ensure that we can offer a full quality partnership to all our travelling public?

Mr. Spellar: As my hon. Friend will be aware, a considerable number of bus companies have introduced low-floor buses with their new bus stock. Many community transport schemes are using a wide variety of vehicles that are much more accessible not only to people in wheelchairs but to those with walking difficulties. Indeed, I was recently near his area—near Rotherham—visiting Optare, a company that produces many such vehicles for local use. We are seeing real partnerships, with the bus companies and local authorities producing that sort of service to achieve the widest possible range of transport and to reduce social exclusion.

Infrastructure (North Staffordshire)

10. **Paul Farrelly** (Newcastle-under-Lyme): What grants and assistance have been given to north Staffordshire for the improvement of transport infrastructure since 1997. [81332]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. David Jamieson): Funding for north Staffordshire is allocated to Stoke-on-Trent city council and Staffordshire county council. In the five years since 1997, they have received a total of £93.6 million in transport grant and borrowing approval. I am sure that my hon. Friend will be delighted to know that funding in his area through the local transport plans has doubled in recent years.

Paul Farrelly: I thank my hon. Friend for that reply. I am sure that he is aware that north Staffordshire needs more investment and, frankly, more regeneration expertise to unlock the capital sums that the Government have already earmarked. A key priority is regeneration for the whole A500, A50 and A34 corridor running between Stoke-on-Trent and my constituency. Will his Department consider favourably any requests by the north Staffordshire—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I will not allow an hon. Member to read out a supplementary question.

Mr. Jamieson: My hon. Friend will know that the completion of the A50 dual carriageway to the M1 has brought many benefits to his area. The public inquiry on the A50—the Potteries D road—to which he referred, was completed on 7 November and, subject to the usual planning consents, work will start next year.

Widford Bridge, Chelmsford

11. **Mr. Simon Burns** (West Chelmsford): When he expects work to commence on strengthening Widford Bridge in Chelmsford. [81333]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. David Jamieson): The Highways Agency is carrying out detailed design and preparation of a scheme to replace the Widford bridge and expects work to start in August 2003. The agency intends to complete the scheme by February 2005.

Mr. Burns: I thank the Minister for that reply. Given the delays caused by the weight restrictions, especially in the morning and afternoon rush hours, the fact that the Minister's answer suggests that the commencement date has been brought forward a few months will be warmly welcomed by my constituents and me. If he can continue

to use his influence and bring it further forward—if that is not pushing my luck—we should be even more grateful to him.

Mr. Jamieson: The hon. Gentleman and I have exchanged considerable correspondence on this matter, especially earlier in the year when Chelmsford borough council implemented the width restrictions before all the necessary signs were in place.

Mr. Burns: A Liberal council.

Mr. Jamieson: I was not going to make that point.

Due to the poor condition of the bridge, there has to be a temporary closure of the rail line, and most of that work will have to be done during the quieter winter period, so the hon. Gentleman will appreciate that there would be some difficulty in bringing the date further forward than 2005. I take his point, however, and we shall do whatever we can to bring the issue forward.

M6 Toll Road

12. **Michael Fabricant** (Lichfield): When the toll structure for the M6 toll road will be announced; and if he will make a statement. [81334]

The Minister for Transport (Mr. John Spellar): Midland Expressway Ltd.—MEL—which has the concession to construct and operate the M6 toll road, also known as the Birmingham northern relief road, is responsible for setting and announcing toll levels.

Michael Fabricant: I thank the Minister for that answer. As he knows, many people in the west midlands welcome the construction of the road, which will do much to stimulate the economy not only in that region but also in the north-west. However, does he accept that it has caused considerable disruption to the lives of local people? Will he use his influence to see whether the toll structure will include discounts for the use of the toll road by local people in the west midlands?

Mr. Spellar: As I said to the hon. Gentleman, that is a matter for the company, although his proposition seems fiendishly difficult and I am sure that if he considered its implications in other areas he would see the difficulties. However, he will be aware that, for example, we arranged for the canal to be taken across. It was extremely important that the work was undertaken during the construction of the road so that it could be done cost-effectively and I know that it was widely welcomed in his constituency and also, I think, by him.

Mr. Brian Jenkins (Tamworth): My right hon. Friend is aware that some of us in the region did not welcome the construction of that road. However, now that the first toll road in Britain is a fact, is the Department prepared to conduct a survey to assess the impact of traffic on surrounding roads, especially on the A5 past the village of Hints up to the Weeford island?

Mr. Spellar: My hon. Friend will know, from his previous incarnation as the leader of a local council, that we regularly work with local authorities to monitor traffic and, indeed, the effect of new road projects. That is enormously important so that we have proper data for our understanding about where and when future roads need to be constructed. However, if he has a particular problem, I should be more than happy to receive representations from him to see how it can be resolved.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): As someone whose constituency has been greatly affected by the road, may I reinforce the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant)? When may we have an announcement about the tolls—whoever is responsible for determining what they should be? Will the Minister discuss with Midland Expressway some form of concession for local residents?

Mr. Spellar: I suspect that deciding what is local in that context would be extremely difficult. There would be considerable argument about people living near the borders. The practicalities of such a course of action would be difficult and it does not commend itself—nor did it when the hon. Gentleman's party were in government and signed the original agreement.

Bus Services

13. **Helen Southworth** (Warrington, South): What steps he is taking to encourage people to use bus services. [81335]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. David Jamieson): The Government's 10-year transport plan and provisions in the Transport Act 2000 provide a sound basis for achieving improvements in bus services. We are building on that through a number of initiatives. For example, the bus partnership forum is bringing together the industry and local authorities to overcome any potential barriers to bus patronage growth.

Helen Southworth: I thank the Minister for that answer. My constituents are benefiting from significant Government investment in local bus services, but will he use his very best efforts to ensure that we get a new bus interchange very soon to replace the current, inadequate bus station, which provides very poor access for disabled people, families with young children and older people?

Mr. Jamieson: I am sure that my hon. Friend will appreciate the fact that we have doubled the funding for local transport plans, which will help to provide better bus services in her area. I am aware that she has made a very robust case for the Warrington bus interchange, which will improve facilities for passengers and provide real-time information and CCTV. I am also aware that she met my right hon. Friend the Minister for Transport to press the matter very hard last month. I can assure her that a decision will be made very shortly.

CABINET OFFICE

The Minister of State was asked—

E-Government

36. **Ms Ann Coffey** (Stockport): What assessment he has made of the outcomes resulting from the recent summit on the delivery of e-government. [81358]

The Minister of State, Cabinet Office (Mr. Douglas Alexander): Earlier today, the Prime Minister made it clear that the Government will invest £6 billion in information technology in the next few years. That funding will include resources not only to improve access to online services, but to drive up the usage of key services.

Ms Coffey: I thank the Minister for his reply, but will he outline what benefits my constituents might expect as a result of the Prime Minister's speech today on the role of information technology in delivering Government programmes?

Mr. Alexander: I can assure the House that this is a genuine coincidence, but the Prime Minister identified Stockport as one of the areas of e-services in the midst of an important, groundbreaking speech today. He talked about the experience of a GP surgery in Stockport in using new technology to ensure a more efficient service not just for patients, but for doctors as well. That is why we particularly welcome the announcement in relation to schools and doctors' surgeries made by the Prime Minister today.

Mr. Greg Knight (East Yorkshire): Summits are all very well, but does the hon. Gentleman accept that they are no substitute for action? Has he seen the recent survey, published by Jupiter Research, which shows that the United Kingdom is one of the slowest connected countries to the internet, with only 7 per cent. using broadband, and most of that 7 per cent., of course, is in urban areas. Is not that appalling? Is he aware that the figure is nearly 30 per cent.? in Sweden? Why are they doing so much better than we are? Is it not the case that, under the John Major Government in the mid-1990s, we led the world in this area? Why is the United Kingdom now a world laggard?

Mr. Alexander: Far from leading the world then, the real progress has been made during the past year. Broadband connections are being made at the rate of 28,000 a month in the United Kingdom and broadband prices have fallen. We have 66 per cent. coverage across the country in terms of DSL-enabled exchanges. The real progress is being made under this Labour Government, which is why we are rapidly moving up the progress league table to become an even more connected economy in the years to come.

Margaret Moran (Luton, South): I congratulate my hon. Friend on the progress that we are making in extending broadband across the country, but does he agree that it is important that our public services include interactive e-government delivery, particularly to allow feedback on the quality of services provided to citizens and to ensure that there are opportunities for e-consultation and e-democracy?

Mr. Alexander: I pay tribute to my hon. Friend's work in this area; it is a matter of genuine concern to her. I would make two points. First, we have an obligation to continue to pursue our target of extending access to services now being provided electronically online. Secondly—again, the Prime Minister made this clear at the summit today—it is vital that we drive up the take-up of those services. That relies on having citizen-focused, customer-focused services, and we rely on having exactly the kind of feedback that has been identified to ensure that we design those services in the future.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): If every school and every doctor's surgery is to be connected to broadband, can the Minister specify how that connection will be achieved in those areas where it is not available on the telephone exchange?

Mr. Alexander: A range of broadband technologies is available. One of the other aspects of the summit today was the announcement, made by my colleague the Minister for E-Commerce and Competitiveness in the Department of Trade and Industry, on the establishment of the United Kingdom broadband taskforce, which is specifically charged with driving out further infrastructure across the country—exactly the point that I was making. Wireless, satellite, DSL—digital subscriber line—and cable technology is available. That is why the Government's platform neutrality is important. We need to work together with other regions to ensure that we get the right solution for each locality.

Civil Service (Equal Opportunities)

37. **Mr. Chris Pond** (Gravesham): If he will make a statement on progress in recruiting people from ethnic minorities into the civil service. [81359]

39. **Mr. Andrew Dismore** (Hendon): What steps he is taking to ensure equality of opportunity in recruitment to the civil service. [81362]

The Minister of State, Cabinet Office (Mr. Douglas Alexander): The Government are strongly committed to a civil service that is fully representative of the community that it serves. Ethnic minorities make up 7.6 per cent. of the civil service as a whole, and 3 per cent. at senior civil service level, up from 1.6 per cent. in April 1998. Our target is 3.2 per cent. of senior civil servants by 2004–05. Departments have delegated responsibility for most recruitment, and have set themselves challenging diversity targets.

Mr. Pond: I thank my hon. Friend for that answer, and I welcome the progress that is being made to make the civil service more representative of the community that it serves. However, is he aware that, in my constituency, as throughout Britain, many young people from black and Asian communities could do a very good job in our public services but may be reticent

about coming forward? The more senior role models we have, the better those people will be encouraged and the better the quality of public services that we can provide.

Mr. Alexander: I endorse my hon. Friend's sentiments. It may be some comfort to him to be aware that the Council of Ethnic Minority Voluntary Sector Organisations, along with the civil service, is running a series of seminars directed at the kind of challenge that he identifies in a range of communities across the country.

Mr. Dismore: Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the best ways of improving equality of opportunity in the civil service would be to improve the nationality laws, which currently preclude one in six Londoners from even applying for the most lowly grade of clerical job? Is that not one of the real barriers to both recruitment in London and to equal opportunities?

Mr. Alexander: My hon. Friend is aware that we have spoken in the Chamber on that issue before, and we have corresponded, too. In July, I wrote to him stating that we want to see progress to open up the civil service to selection on merit, regardless of nationality, but in a way that does not compromise our right to reserve posts for UK nationals where that is absolutely necessary. That remains the Government's position.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): Does the Minister agree that one department in which people from ethnic minorities could make a vital contribution, in the current environment, is the Security Service? Can he say whether the Security Service has succeeded in recruiting people from ethnic minorities who would be of particular value under current circumstances?

Mr. Alexander: As the hon. Gentleman will be aware, there is a long-standing precedent not to discuss the intelligence services in this place. If there are specific matters of relevance that I can divulge, however, I shall happily write to him on that point.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): Does the Minister accept the verdict of the Commission for Racial Equality that the current position in respect of ethnic minority recruitment to the civil service is "thoroughly disappointing"?

Mr. Alexander: I certainly believe that we can do better, which is why we have set exactly the kind of stretching diversity targets to which I referred earlier. I commend the actions of this Government, however, in taking seriously and driving forward that agenda, given what we inherited in 1997.

Tony Wright (Cannock Chase): Does my hon. Friend share my disappointment that progress towards the diversity targets has seen a setback over the last year? The upper reaches of the civil service are still overwhelmingly white and male, and although 52 per cent. of the civil service are women, only 20 per cent. of senior management posts are held by women. Will he therefore make sure that the new Cabinet Secretary shows as much energy as the last one in driving forward the diversity targets?

Mr. Alexander: I assure my hon. Friend that I have spoken to the Cabinet Secretary on precisely that point. I also assure him that, at every level of Government, it is recognised that we must do more in this area. That is why we are driving forward this important agenda.

Ministerial Code of Conduct

38. **Norman Baker** (Lewes): What plans he has to amend the ministerial code of conduct. [81360]

The Minister of State, Cabinet Office (Mr. Douglas Alexander): A revised ministerial code was published in June 2001. It is kept under review. The normal practice is for the ministerial code to be updated and published after a general election.

Norman Baker: Does the Minister recall that the Prime Minister, on 11 December 2001, promised to review the ministerial code to ban advance leaks of public announcements? Why has that not happened? Is it because the Government wish to retain the right to brief the press in advance, as they did a week ago in relation to the Queen's Speech?

Mr. Alexander: First, I disagree with the hon. Gentleman's characterisation of briefings prior to the Queen's Speech or the intimations made. On his substantive point, however, there is clear precedent on this matter. If there are changes in the code, which is kept under review, correspondence is passed to the relevant Ministers. None the less, a revised code is generally published immediately following a general election, as I believe was the case after the last general election.

Mr. Lindsay Hoyle (Chorley): Does my hon. Friend believe that there should be an enhanced role for the Cabinet Secretary in the case of the ministerial code?

Mr. Alexander: I do not. I believe that the Cabinet Secretary can provide vital information to Ministers on their interpretation of the code. None the less, it lies within the domain of the Prime Minister to be the enforcer of the ministerial code.

Mr. Tam Dalyell (Linlithgow): Since the issue is killing by the state, in the light of the historic judgment in the High Court by Lord Justice Woolf at the request of the Wiltshire coroner, can the ministerial code of conduct be reconsidered? It might be helpful if it could deal—albeit in retrospect—with an incident that took place many years ago and if it could establish which Labour and Conservative Ministers knew what about the truly outrageous behaviour that allowed unsuspecting national servicemen, such as Ronald Maddison, to go to their deaths as a result of what were purported to be experiments on the common cold? In the light of the judgment, will the Government look at the matter?

Mr. Alexander: As I have stated, we keep the ministerial code under review. However, it is normal practice for it to be issued in revised form only following a general election. I have heard the points that my hon. Friend has made and, if he wishes to write to me on this matter, I will ensure that the letter is passed to the relevant individual in government.

Sexual Offences Law Reform

3.31 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. David Blunkett): With permission, Mr Speaker, I wish to make a statement on the reform of the laws on sex offences and offending.

Today, we are publishing a Command Paper outlining proposals to increase public protection and to modernise current laws. First, may I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw) who, as the former Home Secretary, established these reviews? I pay tribute also to those who have contributed to the reviews and the consultations that followed. A summary of responses has been placed in the Library of the House.

Protection of the public from dangerous and sex offenders is a priority for this Government and for the House. All crime has a damaging effect on individuals and communities, but sex crimes, particularly against children, can tear apart the fabric of society.

We have already put in place important protection measures. We have established public protection panels to manage offenders in the community, and introduced sex offender and restraining orders. We have set up a taskforce on child protection on the internet and introduced disqualification orders to stop unsuitable people working with children. The registration requirements in the Sex Offenders Act 1997 have already been strengthened. But there is more that needs to be done, in addition to the revision of sentences and monitoring included in the new criminal justice legislation.

We are working in government and with other agencies to develop new measures to catch offenders who abscond or change their names without telling the police. As a step towards this, all sex offenders will be obliged to register with the police every year. Fingerprints and photographs will be renewed. Offenders will be required to provide their national insurance details. In future, we will aim to use biometrics to ensure that we know who they are and where they are. Those entering Britain who we know have been convicted abroad will have to register and to comply with the Sex Offenders Act.

The research that we are publishing today shows that some violent offenders have a greater propensity to commit sex crimes. We are not prepared to wait until they do before we take action. For that reason, we will allow sex offender orders and restraining orders to be taken out against anyone convicted of a serious violent offence if the police believe that they present a real risk.

The law on sex offences is archaic and incoherent. The Sexual Offences Act is 46 years old and was mostly a simple consolidation of 19th-century law. Our proposals for reform reflect changes in society and social attitudes and, most importantly, will better protect the public, particularly children and the vulnerable. All sex crimes are abhorrent, but none more so than those committed against children.

The internet has opened up a new world. Chat rooms allow children to contact each other. But we must deal with those who use the internet to groom children for abuse. To tackle that both online and offline, we will create a new offence of sexual grooming. That implements the recommendations of the taskforce on child protection on the internet. To further strengthen protection, we will create a new civil order to prevent inappropriate adult behaviour, such as sending children explicit e-mails or photographs. A further offence of an adult committing a sex act with a child will cover anyone over 13 but under 16, and where ostensibly consent of the child has been claimed. It will carry a maximum sentence of 14 years.

We do not believe that any very young child truly gives consent to an adult. In a recent case, a 32-year-old man was tried for having sex with a 12-year-old. The judge pronounced that he was not a paedophile. I beg to disagree. In future, such cases will be treated as rape. The issue of consent where a child of 12 or younger is involved will not be relevant.

We have no intention of interfering in consensual relationships between adults, but some people with a severe mental disorder or a learning disability are particularly vulnerable to abuse. Convictions under current laws are hard to achieve. There are often difficulties in gathering evidence from someone who is not only deeply distressed but does not understand what has happened. For that reason, we will create a new offence of sex acts with a person who could not have had the capacity to consent.

I want more criminals to be convicted, not at the expense of the innocent but because of the cost to society. Giving more rights to victims and communities does not erode the rights of defendants. This is not a zero-sum game. It is a miscarriage of justice when an innocent person is wrongly convicted; it is a travesty of justice when the guilty walk free.

Rape is one of the most terrible crimes. The current defence of honest belief in consent means that a rapist can claim in court, no matter how unreasonably, that he honestly believed that consent had been given, and walk away free. That is not justice. We do not wish to convict anyone who genuinely and reasonably believes that consent was given, but we expect a defendant to show that his mistake was not only honest, but in the circumstances, reasonable. I want to make it clear that I have no intention of asking anyone to keep a pen and paper by the bedside, but we will include a test of reasonableness in the law.

All rapes, including drug rape, will continue to carry a maximum penalty of life imprisonment. A new offence of administering drugs with the intent to commit a sex crime will carry a maximum penalty of 10 years. We are sending out a clear message that such offences will be treated very seriously. A new offence of sexual assault will cover a wide range of offending, from minor assaults to more serious crimes such as violent attacks. At the top of the range, offences will carry a maximum sentence of 10 years.

Much has been written about the question of anonymity. I am not minded to change the present situation for defendants who have been accused of sex crime, but I am prepared to listen to the arguments of those who feel strongly on the point.

There is increasing concern about the role of transnational and organised crime in trafficking children and adults for sexual exploitation. New offences with tough penalties will cover those crimes.

[Mr. David Blunkett]

We shall apply those offences to persons trafficked in the UK, whether they are British citizens or foreign nationals.

Many in the House will be aware of the terrible exploitation of women and girls through organised criminal activity, and the use of pimps to promote and control prostitution. Often that is linked to drug dependency and what amounts to organised slavery. It is time in the 21st century to face the reality of that sub-world of degradation and exploitation. We therefore intend to examine the scope for a review of prostitution. We will need to listen carefully to communities that are affected most. From antisocial behaviour to mafia-style criminality, communities are bedevilled by the terrible trade. We must aim to create a safer neighbourhood and an escape route for those trapped by vice.

Our current laws on sex offences are not only archaic but discriminatory. Criminalising acts between homosexuals that are not against the law for heterosexuals goes against the principle of equality and previous reforms. We will therefore update the law to ensure equality of treatment. Consensual sex in private that does not harm anyone should no longer be a criminal offence.

For the sake of absolute clarity and my own peace of mind, I want to point out that we will not be legislating to allow sex in public. Provisions in the Public Order Act 1986, together with common law offences, will remain in place. However, as well as those, we will introduce a new offence to deal with specific sex acts in a public place. That will reinforce a sense of decency and respect for others.

Our overall aim is to create laws that are fit for the 21st century and which provide confidence and protection—laws that remain true to the time-honoured and accepted parameters of a free and civilised society. That is why I commend the statement to the House.

Mr. Oliver Letwin (West Dorset): I am grateful to the Home Secretary for his usual courtesy in providing a copy of the statement.

We welcome the Home Secretary's statement. It has been a long time coming, but it has come at last. Some months ago, we made six suggestions to increase the protection of children from paedophiles. From the White Paper and briefings surrounding it, I detect that the Home Office has adopted—or is in the course of adopting—four of those suggestions, and that is very welcome.

The White Paper deals with a wider range of issues relating to sex offences. In general and subject to certain caveats to which I will come in a moment, it appears to have found a reasonable way through what is by any standards a nasty thicket. We welcome the Home Secretary's refusal to make sex offenders registers public. We welcome the protection of disabled people and of minors subject to exploitation as prostitutes, and we welcome the Home Secretary's decision to retain the presumption of innocence in relation to rape. I hope that he will profit from his own example in the Extradition Bill and the Criminal Justice Bill. I cannot say that I believe that the proposed changes to rape law are likely to make a difference to conviction rates, but the Home Secretary has at least avoided doing any harm, for which we must grateful.

We are conscious, however, that the detailed drafting of the law alone will determine whether it has the right effects in practice, and that Bills that receive little scrutiny from the Opposition usually make bad Acts—one is uncomfortably reminded of the Child Support Act 1995. We shall accordingly look in great detail at the drafting of each clause when the Bill is introduced. Will the clauses on grooming be drafted so as adequately to distinguish between a manifestly evil pattern of genuine grooming and a harmless or even arguably harmless gesture from an adult to a child? Will the clauses defining the new test of reasonableness in relation to consent to a sexual act, to which the Home Secretary referred in his statement, be drafted to reflect the delicate balance between the right of the woman to be protected from rape and the right of the man to be exonerated from slanderous allegations?

Will the clauses on voyeurism be drafted to distinguish clearly between the landlord who sets up invisible closed circuit television cameras in his tenants' bedrooms and the innocent individual who merely espies whatever is still allowed once the Home Secretary has explicitly banned sexual acts in public? We cannot expect the Home Secretary to answer those questions in any but the most general terms today. However, we and our colleagues in the Lords will want to explore them, and others like them, constructively, carefully and effectively when the Bill is introduced.

All good criminal law strikes a balance between public protection and the protection of civil liberties. The Government have begun, after long consideration, to build on the foundations laid by my right hon. Friend the shadow Chancellor, when he was Home Secretary, in the Sex Offenders Act 1997. We shall now do our job as an Opposition, probing and questioning to ensure that the right balance is struck when the Bill is enacted.

Mr. Blunkett: I am grateful for the right hon. Gentleman's comments and the manner in which he delivered them. I am glad that we made four out of six. I thought that he might refer to suggestions that had already been floated—I caught the echo in the right hon. Gentleman's voice. That is the Opposition's job—to pick up what the Government are about to do, turn it into a suggestion and claim the credit for it. I am happy to let the right hon. Gentleman have a bash at that while I have a bash at what he described as the "nasty thicket".

The right hon. Gentleman is right—Governments of all persuasions have eschewed engagement with this for a very long time indeed. In my approach, I was mindful of the balance that he talked about at the end of his speech. The difficulties of being able to find a way through this have exercised me for several months, and the statement was drafted and redrafted. I accept entirely what the right hon. Gentleman said about the detailed drafting of the legislation. It is going to be a nightmare, and I invite him and all Members who have a contribution to make to assist us. I would like unanimity to establish a new foundation that will ensure that this aspect of the law, if nothing else, has the wholehearted backing of Members on both sides of the House, not just a majority.

I agree that the test of reasonableness is difficult. It may not be easy to obtain true convictions of the guilty even with a reasonableness test. However, given that, since 1985, the number of convictions of the accused has dropped from 25 per cent. to 7 per cent., it is doubtful that people are coming forward with the relevant information or that this is being dealt with adequately under the existing law.

On grooming, I agree entirely that we need to be able to distinguish. The Crown Prosecution Service will have to make sensible judgments about what constitutes a genuine offence under the new law. We are all agreed. All parties were represented on the taskforce, as well as outside organisations, including my friends in Liberty. When I attended one of the first meetings after taking over, I invited them to come up with an alternative if they did not like what we were suggesting. I extend the same invitation to all those interested in the criminal justice system. It is easy to be against something, but very difficult to be in favour of an alternative if one does not have one.

The right hon. Gentleman rightly raises an interesting question concerning voyeurism. We do not wish to interfere with the freedom of the press or with people going about their normal business, but it is entirely wrong that people should be spied on and the product of that spying used for titillation or for exploitation in the sex market. It is long overdue that we should protect people in a civilised and free society from the entrepreneurship of those whose trade is in evil. For those reasons, I am pleased that we appear to have a rational and sensible debate as we create the legislation and introduce it in the early new year, to bring about a modern, more sensible approach to our laws.

Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): I, too, welcome the consultation, the proposals before the House and many of the details. From the Liberal Democrat Benches, the Home Secretary will get full and constructive opposition. Particularly to be welcomed is the presumption from now on that nobody under the age of 13 can consent to sexual activity. That needs to be clear and straightforward to protect the young and to meet the great emphasis on the protection of the vulnerable and the apparently careful definition of consent, which seems to strike the right balance and which is welcome.

Does the Home Secretary accept that if the concerns of the public are to be allayed effectively by the legislation, we need to couple the next 12 months' legislative work with making sure that the Criminal Records Bureau is able to resume its checks, so that everybody in contact with the young and the vulnerable is checked? Can the right hon. Gentleman tell us whether he is able to make sure that when British citizens convicted of offences abroad return to the UK, they will be known to the authorities in the UK from the moment their conviction is registered in the courts abroad? That has long been a matter of great concern, which I have raised with the right hon. Gentleman's colleagues.

Young people should feel comfortable and able to give evidence that is as truthful as possible. Has the Home Office come to a view on whether the Scottish system of children's courts is a better model for young people's evidence and trials than the conventional jury trial, which is often intimidating and off-putting?

Do I take it that the Home Secretary is very clear—the right hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) also asked this question—that there will not be public access to the register of child offenders? The system that the Department has put in place is working well in making sure that those who need to know are told, and are told in time.

Lastly, one of the concerns in recent months has been about those who have been sex offenders and who return to the community. As well as monitoring, there needs to be treatment, which must be adequately resourced to make sure that they have the maximum chance of not offending again. Will the Home Secretary be able to couple these worthwhile modernising proposals with the resources to make sure that treatment is available in the community, to deal with people who are among the most difficult to deal with in the criminal justice system?

We welcome the proposals. It is 50 years since we modernised the law on sexual offences. I hope that the Home Secretary will see the measure as one that brings all sexual law reform together. If that is the case, we will welcome a great and consolidating opportunity.

Mr. Blunkett: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. I winced slightly when he said that he would give full and constructive opposition. I wanted him to give full and constructive support, but I will take the small measures that I can get.

Yes, we do need to ensure that the Criminal Records Bureau works effectively, and we are taking every possible step to ensure that, including receiving the external evaluation report before Christmas and acting on it. We should remind people, incidentally, that—difficult as its birth has been—the CRB has lessened the risks and increased the safeguards enormously since 1 April.

As for British citizens convicted abroad, we need the co-operation of our embassies and those who monitor the incarceration of people apprehended in other countries. As I said in my statement, it must then be ensured that they are covered by the monitoring and registration provisions domestically.

Evidence given by children is a difficult issue, and the Scottish example is worth examining. We intend to produce a substantive discussion paper on children at risk early in the new year, and I want to include the development of children's courts and related measures.

The shadow Home Secretary was right: we will resist the request for public access to the register, for all the reasons that we have debated publicly over the past few months. It would drive people underground, it would be ineffective, and it would increase the danger of people—outside courts, that is—not understanding the difference between "paedophilia" and "paediatrician".

The question of treatment is important, and I am glad it has been raised. A lot is going on. We know from the difficulty of siting clinics what a delicate and difficult area this is, but we must plough on together, and we must ask local politicians as well as local residents to be understanding. If we are to stop people reoffending, treatment must be better than a free-for-all in which people remain in the community, but no work is done to ensure that they do not offend again.

Ms Gisela Stuart (Birmingham, Edgbaston): I welcome my right hon. Friend's announcement of a review of the law on prostitution and, in particular, his recognition that prostitution affects neighbourhoods as well. Will he consider measures to deal with kerb-crawlers, who cause a problem in my constituency? Such measures might include the imposition of penalty points on driving licences and the possibility of impounding vehicles. In our experience, both kerb-crawlers and prostitution on the streets can be dealt with very effectively.

Mr. Blunkett: The existing changes to the Act have strengthened our powers in relation to arrest. Fixed-penalty notices are a good idea, and it is important to concentrate not just on the women involved but on those who seek them out; but the real criminals in prostitution are the organised gangs behind it—people who capture young women in particular by enticing them into addiction to class A drugs, and the pimps who then use them not only to feed their own habits but to sustain themselves in the manner to which they have become accustomed. Unless we tackle that organised mafia criminality, rather than merely concentrating on the individuals involved, we shall have missed the point.

Mr. Ian Taylor (Esher and Walton): The Home Secretary may know that in my constituency live the families of the murdered girls Sarah Payne and Milly Dowler. I know that he has said he will listen to the Dowlers, as his predecessor listened to the Paynes. I am against naming and shaming, but will the Home Secretary confirm that his proposals will lead to indeterminate sentencing for sex offenders, with no premature release, and to much tighter arrangements to monitor offenders after their release if they have previously received treatment?

During their inquiries into the Milly Dowler case, the Surrey police found many people who had never been on a sex offenders register but probably ought to have been. The danger to individuals in the community exists, however tight the law is. Will the Home Secretary give some support to the AMBER—American missing broadcast emergency response—system, which at least gives the police a mechanism for conveying information to the public? It is possible that, during the first critical hours after an abduction, someone will notice something that will help the police.

Mr. Blunkett: I thank the hon. Gentleman. I have met Sara Payne twice and Michael Payne once, and I got in touch with the Dowler family after the tragedy. I am prepared not only to continue to listen to them but to respond in the way in which the hon. Gentleman requests. Within days, we will publish the criminal justice Bill, which will include proposals on indeterminate sentences, substantial strengthening of monitoring and registration requirements. I or one of my Ministers will be happy to talk to him personally about the Bill as soon as it is published.

I am prepared to look at the AMBER alert. I pay tribute to the shadow Home Secretary, the right hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin). I made remarks earlier about plagiarism. Where there is good evidence, and where we need to pick people up, I am happy to plagiarise his suggestion that we use more upfront methods of communication across the country, including public screens, to warn people. We should share those ideas, because it makes Parliament a much more worthwhile place. Even with the present state of the Opposition, all of us have to bear it in mind that at some point the electorate will have had enough of us.

Julie Morgan (Cardiff, North): I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement, but will he look again at the issue of anonymity for defendants in rape cases, especially those involving rape within marriage? Many women hesitate before taking cases to court not only because a tiny percentage of defendants are convicted but because of the problems of publicity for them and their families.

Mr. Blunkett: The person making the allegation of rape is protected. My hon. Friend asks about the anonymity of the accused person. The difficulty for us and for the House is how we distinguish between rape and other very serious offences—for example, murder—and the damage that is done to the character of an individual who is accused but found not guilty.

I am prepared to continue to listen because this is a serious issue. We have been through it once before, and for every opinion in one direction there are several in the other: there is no clever, easy answer. There is certainly no political divide on the matter.

Miss Julie Kirkbride (Bromsgrove): Further to that point, although I broadly welcome almost everything the Home Secretary has said today, I still have some reservations about the planned changes to the law on rape. I welcome the fact that there will still be a presumption of innocence, but I worry whether vexatious claims will be made more likely as a result of the proposals; such claims are made in a very charged atmosphere, and therefore fall in a slightly different category. Will he give an assurance that his proposals will not encourage vexatious claims? Subject to the last question, will he offer Labour Members a free vote on whether there should be anonymity for those accused of rape, because there is anonymity for those who are said to be the victims of rape?

Mr. Blunkett: Let me take the two substantive questions. The reasonableness test is important. So that there is no misunderstanding, particularly outside, it is worth making it clear that I have rejected the suggestion that someone inebriated could claim that they were unable to give consent—as opposed to someone who was unconscious for whatever reason, including because of alcohol, and was therefore unable to do so—on the ground that we do not want mischievous accusations in circumstances where someone genuinely had reasonable and honest belief of consent.

On the latter point, I am always prepared to consider and to recommend free votes to my right hon. and hon. Friends; they are sometimes very handy in difficult circumstances. We all learn lessons from that. I said that there is no party political difference and that it is a finely balanced argument. It does the House quite a lot of good if occasionally we accept that on major substantive

legislation and, on particular clauses and amendments, we are prepared to argue our case and to hear our colleagues, rather than to enforce a three-line Whip.

Mr. Chris Pond (Gravesham): I very much welcome my right hon. Friend's proposed changes to ensure that there will be no excuses for sexually assaulting a child under the age of 13. I should point out, however, that, in two or three recent cases in my constituency, children between the ages of 13 and 16 were involved in sexual relationships with middle-aged men, yet the police and the Crown Prosecution Service refused to take any action whatsoever. It would be helpful if my right hon. Friend assured the House that we are not reducing the age of consent to 13, and if he encouraged the police and the CPS to take action against what are still unlawful acts in such circumstances.

Mr. Blunkett: It is precisely because of the inability to take action in the circumstances that my hon. Friend describes that, far from taking away something, we are bringing in a new law with a 10-year maximum penalty. It is correct to say that there is a real difficulty—not least when the participants are unwilling to give evidence—but we do need to tackle this situation, because it is unacceptable. The current legislative framework does not allow the police to deal with such matters decisively.

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): The Home Secretary has mentioned several very useful initiatives that are to be commended, but may I raise one matter that concerns me and doubtless many others inside and outside this House: the notion of applying sex offender orders to people convicted of violent offences? In a typical scenario in which a person is charged with a grievous bodily harm, section 20, offence that is ultimately dealt with as an actual bodily harm, section 47, offence, some police officers will feel aggrieved that that person was not dispatched to custody. Will the Home Secretary accept the need for an independent evaluation of the police's belief in "a real risk"?

Mr. Blunkett: Yes, I will—on the evidence adduced and the sufficiency for the Crown Prosecution Service to pursue a case in the first place, and in the light of whether evidence was disqualified because it was shown that it had no relevance whatsoever to a sexual offence. This is a very delicate area. The research that we are publishing today shows that a real problem exists—a massive propensity in relation to further sex crimes—but I have emblazoned on my heart a point that was made earlier: in all such cases, we must balance the need for public protection and the well-being of the community against the civilised and human rights of the individual.

Vera Baird (Redcar): Does my right hon. Friend agree that, irrespective of whether the proposed change to the defence of honest belief—requiring that it be "reasonable"— increases the number of convictions, perhaps its primary importance is that it ought to encourage a change of attitude? It should deter some men from assuming consent, and it should tell them that their conduct will be scrutinised according to stricter, but reasonable, criteria from now on. Will he give me his assessment of the impact of this change on the relevance of previous sexual history in rape trials?

Mr. Blunkett: We are treading on dangerous territory, and I am weighing words such as "scrutinise" very carefully. As my hon. and learned Friend will know—I made this point to the shadow Home Secretary—in developing the legislation we are prepared to take on board those with a long-standing and deep interest in this area, and in particular the questions arising from the history of the individual concerned, and how they can be weighed. Once it is published, the House will soon debate the criminal justice Bill. We will deal with the issue of how we evaluate the evidence on which the current circumstance and accusation is mounted, so that we consider the circumstances and behaviour of the individual in the light of the evidence adduced in court.

Sir Paul Beresford (Mole Valley): The Home Secretary will be aware that in the House there is a general feeling of support for his White Paper, probably almost as strong as there will be for the Bill when it finally appears. He asks for a constructive reaction from the Opposition; may we ask for an equally constructive reaction from Government Members, because many positive ideas can emerge, including, for example, the paedophile information exchange case, which showed the need to deal with encryption, and the Milly case, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Esher and Walton (Mr. Taylor) referred, which raised difficulties over obtaining information from the internet that is not covered in the White Paper?

Mr. Blunkett: The simple answer is yes. There is no desire to exclude new ideas or new thinking on shaping our proposals. I know that the shadow Home Secretary has already raised with my colleagues the issue of encryption because I made sure that I found out what he had said to them. I would like to take that forward because it is a serious issue.

Martin Linton (Battersea): Will my right hon. Friend accept a welcome for his proposals, especially his plans to ensure that those guilty of rape or sexual assault are more likely to be convicted? He is right to talk about a sub-world of trafficking, prostitution and sexual exploitation. It is an evil trade that destroys the lives of children and their families. Will he assure the House that encouraging a child into prostitution and engaging in the trafficking of adults or children for commercial gain will become offences that will be dealt with with the utmost seriousness?

Mr. Blunkett: On seriousness and severity, we are proposing sentences of up to 14 years. The message needs to get out to those who are organising that trade that we, as a House and as a Parliament, intend to join together in doing everything possible to go after them. If the message gets across locally as well as nationally that we are serious about this and will work together on finding a way to ensure that enforcement is as clear as our intent, we could do a great deal of good in the years ahead.

Sandra Gidley (Romsey): Will the Home Secretary acknowledge that eight days is plenty of time for a sex

[Sandra Gidley]

offender to reoffend? If he agrees with that, will he act to protect young children in holiday destinations overseas by insisting that the period of notice is reduced from eight days, because any visit, however short, should be notified in order to protect young children?

Mr. Blunkett: The White Paper says that should such people move within this country, the registration period should be within three days. I am happy to look at ensuring that that is codified in a way that ensures that it is the same should they leave the country. I am weighing up the question of whether those who are registered and are severe offenders should leave the country at all, but we will have to look at that.

Ms Julia Drown (South Swindon): Does the Home Secretary agree that the Government must take the lead when surveys show that one in five young men think that it is acceptable to force a woman to have sex if that person is their wife, and a further 15 per cent. are unsure about whether it is acceptable? May I urge the Home Secretary to look seriously at the issue of irrelevant sexual history, which is brought into court cases far too frequently and is one of the key reasons for the appallingly low conviction rate? Unless that sexual history, which is hardly ever relevant to rape cases, is taken out of court proceedings, the appalling rate of conviction in rape cases will continue.

Mr. Blunkett: That is why, as I said to my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Redcar (Vera Baird), we need to weigh up carefully how we distinguish between different forms of evidence. We need to ensure that we do not throw the baby out with the bath water. The substantive question about men's expectations towards women is a profound one. Let me make it clear that no should always mean no, and no young man, whether in a marriage or any other form of relationship, should presume that he owns or has rights to someone else's body. That is why those delicate issues need to be handled with great sensitivity.

The message is clear: when a woman says no, she means no, whether in marriage or otherwise. There should be no presumption in any circumstances that if someone does not wish to engage in intimate relations, they should be forced to do so. We need to develop that message as part of our wider sex and relationship education in schools, in which I played some part when I was the Secretary of State for Education and Skills. We also need to ensure that the message reaches young women that they have every right to say no, and that they should exert that right.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): I am glad that the Home Secretary is not proposing to publish the names and addresses of convicted paedophiles. Is he aware that I am currently professionally engaged in a case in which the publication of the name and address of an alleged paedophile—the person was actually acquitted—led directly to the murder of that person?

Mr. Blunkett: I was not aware that the right hon. and learned Gentleman was involved in that case, but I take his point entirely.

Mrs. Claire Curtis-Thomas (Crosby): I welcome today's proposals and I hope that we will see an increase in conviction rates for rape, especially in connection with offences committed against people with learning difficulties. However, I am deeply concerned about the effectiveness and efficiency of existing police procedures and the current absence of video facilities and suitably trained individuals to conduct and record interviews with rape and sex abuse victims. Will the Home Secretary consider recording all interviews—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I cannot allow the hon. Lady to read out a speech. It is time for questions. Perhaps the Home Secretary could answer the point that the hon. Lady has already made.

Mr. Blunkett: As part of our wider review of the way in which evidence is adduced, held and presented, the proper recording of evidence—so that it can be brought forward at the appropriate time—will be on the agenda. I hope that that is the question, of which I have not had notice. It sounded to me as though my hon. Friend was asking about the proper recording and presentation of evidence.

Rev. Martin Smyth (Belfast, South): I welcome the Home Secretary's concerns about the sex industry. Will steps be taken to prevent mass applications from folk from third world countries and eastern Europe, who come to the United Kingdom as entertainers but are kept as sex slaves? Is he aware of that problem? I welcome the sentencing standards, but in the past calls for higher sentences have not always been met by judges, who have passed low sentences, sometimes in extreme cases.

Mr. Blunkett: The new law on trafficking with the intent of prostitution and exploitation will address the issue that the hon. Gentleman raises. Catching those involved is as much the issue as achieving convictions, so enforcement procedures will need to be stepped up as part of much broader policies on people trafficking.

There is a problem with sentencing. All of us found extraordinary a recent judgment in which a judge totally misunderstood the strictures of the Lord Chief Justice. It is not normally my role to defend the Lord Chief Justice—or he me—but on this occasion he was maligned by the presumption that he had suggested that a low sentence should be given for an act of paedophilia in circumstances in which all of us would have expected the sentence to be as tough as the law provides for.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): In reviewing the law on prostitution, which is as legally necessary as it is politically challenging, will the Home Secretary confirm that the physical protection of prostitutes, and their access to health and medical advice, will be paramount criteria?

Mr. Blunkett: Yes, and I very much welcome the spirit of the question. In fact, I could not have phrased it better myself. It is challenging in every possible way.

I understand the underlying thrust of the question, and I am not ducking it. I know that the provision of medical assessments and health care takes us up other alley ways, as one might say, but we have to take on this challenge. We in this century must do what Josephine Butler attempted 150 years ago, in a very different era and in a very different way. Otherwise, history will judge us very severely.

Mr. Chris Bryant (Rhondda): My constituent Ian Heffron is the uncle of the "babes in the woods" victims and will welcome my right hon. Friend's proposals on child sex abuse very warmly. I also welcome his statement today that homosexual and heterosexual sex offences should be treated equally under the law. That is a major step forward in British legislation. However, my right hon. Friend seemed a little coy when it came to the new offence of offensive sex in public. Will he say a little more about that?

Mr. Blunkett: I do not want to say too much. We want to ensure that there is clarity, and to give an indication—however difficult that may be—of the sort of activities that will be unacceptable when carried out in places where people would expect to walk, socialise and meet freely. We are talking not about people enjoying the warmth of the afternoon sun in woods distant from these parts, but about activity that would be unacceptable in St. James's park or Trafalgar square. If people understand that, we will be able to calm their fears and at the same time open up equality and provide more sense in what is a very sensitive area.

Mr. Julian Brazier (Canterbury): I welcome the Home Secretary's statement, and especially those elements concerning a crackdown on the revolting trade in child prostitutes. However, I urge the right hon. Gentleman to extend the proposals to the sickening reverse traffic, whereby adult citizens from this country and other parts of the developed world go to third world countries to abuse children. Some rather frail laws are already in place on this matter, but may I urge the right hon. Gentleman to extend the scope of his proposals?

Mr. Blunkett: I think that the whole House would agree with that. We should take whatever steps are needed.

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough): I very much welcome my right hon. Friend's additional proposals to protect people with learning disabilities, but will he consider extending the offence of grooming to include such people? He described how children were the victims of grooming, but people with learning disabilities could be made to consent to sexual activity. People who have found children to be protected more effectively have turned to grooming those with learning disabilities, with the aim of committing sexual offences.

Mr. Blunkett: The offence of grooming would apply in the way that my hon. Friend has set out when threats and inducements were clearly shown to have been used to secure consent from a person unable to give it, and when the person making the approach had understood that incapacity. The problem is more difficult than with children—for example, the declared mental age of the person involved would have to be taken into account—but I do not think that it is beyond the abilities of man or woman to ensure that such a provision were enforced.

Dr. Jenny Tonge (Richmond Park): To ensure that sex offenders do not pose as minicab drivers and rape young women, will the Home Secretary find ways to put pressure on the GLA and the Public Carriage Office to speed up the licensing of private hire vehicles in London?

Mr. Blunkett: Just for once this afternoon I am going to say that I have heard the point. The last Minister who dealt with the issue of cabs was warned that he would be lucky to get a lift anywhere, once his ministerial car had gone. However, we need to take on board the serious point underlying the question.

Margaret Moran (Luton, South): I warmly welcome the link that has been made between trafficking, prostitution and organised crime, which are blighting many areas in my constituency and need to be tackled urgently. I also welcome the new offence of grooming. Is my right hon. Friend aware that moderators of many children's chat sites are not checked by police or anyone else? Given that we know that children's websites are a honeypot for paedophiles, will he consider making such checks a statutory requirement in the future legislation?

Mr. Blunkett: I do not know whether the taskforce has concluded its discussions on that issue. I and the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, my hon. Friend the Member for Leeds, Central (Hilary Benn), who is taking this measure forward, will ensure that we examine that important area. I take this opportunity to say how much I value the support of my hon. Friend, who has guided me through this morass.

Tony Baldry (Banbury): Will the Prison Service have adequate skills and resources to provide appropriate treatment for sex offenders while in prison?

Mr. Blunkett: Yes. Increased investment is being made in that area. In the past, because people would not admit their guilt, they did not take up programmes. So far, programmes have been voluntary or based on a particular technique requiring voluntarism. I am interested in extending such programmes, because offenders who are due to come out of prison, including those who have been given indeterminate sentences, should have treatment and guidance so as to protect the public once they are released.

Geraint Davies (Croydon, Central): As my right hon. Friend knows, only one in 13 reported rapes end in conviction, and as a result many victims do not come forward. Does he share my hopes and expectations that the requirement on the defendant to show not just an honest belief but reasonableness will lead to many more victims coming forward and to more convictions of guilty rapists?

Mr. Blunkett: We all want to encourage those who have experienced this terrible crime and discourage

[Mr. Blunkett]

those who are making mischief. Every right hon. and hon. Member who has spoken has tried to get the balance right, and that will be the task ahead.

Mr. Gary Streeter (South-West Devon): I warmly welcome the Home Secretary's statement. Given that the internet is a genuinely international piece of equipment and is, sadly, the gateway to so much child abuse these days, is he having any conversations with counterparts in the United States and Europe to see whether a more common approach can be taken and more upstream protection be built in, possibly involving discussions with manufacturers of software and hardware? Unless we start to deal internationally with the use of the internet, will we ever get to the bottom of modern child abuse?

Mr. Blunkett: I do not know what has happened, but I agree entirely with the hon. Gentleman. The G8 taskforce, which we are leading, is examining precisely those issues. I very much welcome those comments. This problem involves software manufacturers and servers. It is in the interests of a civilised and decent world that we should try to reach international agreements. As the hon. Gentleman rightly says, there are no boundaries, and we desperately need to ensure that we protect children here and across the world.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): Is it the Home Secretary's intention that DNA from convicted sex offenders should be added permanently to the police national database?

Mr. Blunkett: Currently, half the people who have committed a crime are on the DNA database. It is my intention that that task should be completed by the middle of next year, which will put about 3 million on the database. Those who are currently in custody should have a sample of their DNA taken, which will assist us in apprehending future offenders. I stress that, although it is critical to pick up those who commit crime, preventing crime must be the paramount requirement.

BILL PRESENTED

COMMUNICATIONS

Secretary Tessa Jowell, supported by the Prime Minister, Mr. Secretary Prescott, Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Secretary Straw, Mr. Secretary Blunkett, Mr. Secretary Murphy, Mrs. Secretary Liddell, Ms Secretary Hewitt, Secretary Peter Hain, Mr. Stephen Timms and Dr. Kim Howells, presented a Bill to confer functions on the Office of Communications; to make provision about the regulation of the provision of electronic communications networks and services and of the use of the electro-magnetic spectrum; to make provision about the regulation of broadcasting and of the provision of television and radio services; to make provision about newspaper mergers and, in that connection, to amend the Enterprise Act 2002; and for connected purposes: And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time tomorrow, and to be printed. Explanatory notes to be printed. [Bill 6].

Mr. Speaker: We now come to the main business. The House will notice that I have imposed a nine-minute limit on Back-Bench speeches, the purpose of which is to allow as many Back Benchers to speak as possible. I hope, therefore, that those on the Front Benches will take note.

Orders of the Day

Debate on the Address

[FIFTH DAY]

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question [13 November],

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, as follows:

Most Gracious Sovereign.

We, Your Majesty's most dutiful and loyal subjects, the Commons of the United Kingdom and Great Britain and Northern Ireland, in Parliament assembled, beg leave to offer our humble thanks to Your Majesty for the Gracious Speech which Your Majesty has addressed to both Houses of Parliament.—[*Mr. Foulkes.*]

Question again proposed.

Regions, Transport and DEFRA

Mr. Speaker: I have selected the amendment in the name of the Leader of the Opposition.

4.30 pm

David Davis (Haltemprice and Howden): I beg to move, as an amendment to the Address, at the end of the Question to add:

'But humbly regrets the absence of a Bill to ensure the impartiality of the Civil Service; and further regrets the centralising nature of measures on regional and local government, housing and planning; notes the absence of measures to end insecurity in old age with no Bill to abolish the annuity rule or tackle the crisis in the pension system; further regrets that the Gracious Speech contains no measures to deliver a health service in which no patient is left waiting, but seeks unfairly to charge local authorities for bed-blocking in hospitals, and to grant foundation status only to a small number of hospitals; is concerned at the failure to reduce the burden of regulation on business and to tackle the crisis in the rural economy; welcomes the Bill to create a Railway Accident Investigation Branch, along lines recommended by Her Majesty's Official Opposition, but condemns the failure to address the worsening transport crisis or to improve conditions for passengers, motorists and businesses; and further regrets the failure to give more control over schools to parents and governors, to restore teacher morale, and to improve confidence in the examination system and universities.'.

Before I start on the substantive business, I am sure that the firefighters' dispute may come up in the debate. I will not deal with it in any great detail today because of the pressure on time, but the Deputy Prime Minister may wish to. We will have an opportunity to challenge his handling of the matter another day. I hope, however, that the whole House is with me when I wish him the best of fortune in trying to prevent the strike on Friday, as lives are at stake.

Back in 1999, when the Deputy Prime Minister was last in charge of this area of policy, a Labour-dominated Select Committee condemned his Department's achievements as

"largely confined to the publication of documents and policy statements and the establishment of task forces".

With at least four of his Department's Bills included in this Queen's Speech, he is planning to do something, but unfortunately it is the wrong thing. Most of those Bills share a single theme: Orwellian doublespeak, in which the Government talk of devolution of power but do the opposite. They are not devolving power down; they are grabbing it back up.

Before I deal with those Bills I must refer to the one glaring omission from the Queen's Speech—a Bill firmly promised, but not delivered. We urgently need a civil service Bill, to establish a clear boundary between the civil service and party politics. That is not only the view of the official Opposition. A senior member of the Labour party has said:

"Never has a civil service Bill been more necessary in Britain."

The senior parliamentarian who made that point is the hon. Member for Cannock Chase (Tony Wright), the Chairman of the Public Administration Committee, who speaks for many hon. Members on both sides of the House in saying that.

According to one senior figure, such a Bill is needed to enhance parliamentary scrutiny and to clarify the boundaries between civil servants and special advisers. That senior figure is Sir Richard Wilson, the former head of the civil service. When he said that, he was speaking with the Prime Minister's authority. There is now general agreement both in the House and outside it that legislation is required to mark the boundaries between party and government. It is a mark of the way in which this Government operate that such a Bill should be necessary now, after so many years without one. None the less, necessary it is.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): I am interested in what the right hon. Gentleman is saying. Would such legislation encompass bodies such as the BBC? When its former director general, Mr. John Birt, published his autobiography a couple of weeks ago he admitted to being part of a political campaign involving the Prime Minister and the right hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr. Mandelson) to stop the BBC introducing a Scottish news at 6 o'clock. The current director-general says that he was shocked by that revelation. Would such a Bill encompass the BBC, to secure its historic impartiality, which has been compromised by this Government?

David Davis: No, it would not. I suspect that that would have to be achieved through an amendment to a communications Bill. The hon. Gentleman makes his point in his characteristically cogent manner, however.

The Deputy Prime Minister and I have something in common as we both famously hate spin doctors. So we should agree on this matter, and I urge the Government, on behalf of many hon. Members on both sides of the House, not merely on the Conservative side, to introduce a civil service Bill as soon as possible. Perhaps when the right hon. Gentleman responds to the debate, he will tell us when the Prime Minister's intention of introducing such a Bill will be honoured.

Geraint Davies (Croydon, Central): Will the right hon. Gentleman be going on to talk about what is in the Queen's Speech, or will he take up all his time by talking about what was not in the speech?

David Davis: Sometimes the Opposition have to highlight what the Government do not do, and on this

[David Davis]

occasion there is an extremely important omission—as the hon. Gentleman ought to know, given his other position in the House.

The Government are introducing three Bills and one piece of draft legislation, the draft housing standards Bill, which is generally welcome in its intention, although I want to sound a note of caution. History shows us that when Governments try to get too involved in the regulation of rents and housing, it can lead to disastrous consequences.

Although we realise that houses in multiple occupancy play an important part in providing low-cost housing for rent, and we support greater protection for tenants in such houses that do not meet acceptable health and safety standards, it is vital that regulation should not be excessively burdensome for responsible landlords. If it is, it could actually reduce the availability of affordable rented accommodation and increase the cost of housing for those on low and intermediate incomes.

It is not as if the Government have a good story to tell on housing. Since 1997 the number of homeless people in bed-and-breakfast accommodation has trebled to more than 12,000. During the past couple of months, the Deputy Prime Minister tried to blame the right-to-buy policy for the spiralling number of homeless people under the Government, but since they came to office the building of social housing has plunged from more than 30,000 units a year to just over 20,000 last year. Even if the Government had only maintained the level that they inherited, about 35,000 extra social houses would currently be available. That would be enough to house almost three times the number of families currently living in bed-and-breakfast accommodation under the Labour government.

Jim Knight (South Dorset): The right hon. Gentleman sounds concerned about social housing, so why does he propose selling it off?

David Davis: With such remarkable ignorance, we get the most predictable questions. Even Shelter, which is against the right-to-buy policy, admits that it costs at most 1,500 houses a year, against the 35,000 that were lost as a result of the Government's dilatory approach to housing policy. When the draft housing standards Bill is introduced we shall consider it carefully but, while doing so, we shall remember the Government's poor record on housing.

There will be three substantive Bills and I shall deal first with the planning Bill. Last December, the Government presented four Green Papers, which outlined their proposals for planning reform. If anything, those proposals, some of which have been dropped, were more complex than what they were intended to replace. There was a mixed story as regards consultation. The good news is that there were 15,500 responses to the Green Papers. The bad news is that most of them said that the proposals were rubbish.

Let me make it clear that we support changes that will cut through red tape, speed up the system, give greater certainty to residents and businesses and restore power to local people. That was also the aspiration of the former Select Committee on Transport, Local Government and the Regions, which was, of course, dominated by Labour Members. In its report on the draft local government Bill, the Committee stated:

"if local government is going to regain the public respect and authority it once enjoyed, the Government must be prepared to trust it much more."

Since the last war, Governments of all persuasions, including my own, have exercised too much centralised power over local government, but the Labour Government trust local government so little that they intend to abolish county structure plans. They trust local government so little that they intend to set up what they call "regional spatial strategies"—in other words, a new raft of red tape. They trust local government so little that they plan to set up what they call a "local planning advisory service": in other words, a new central Government quango to meddle with the decisions of local planning authorities.

The Government trust local government so little that unelected officials will decide no less than 90 per cent. of planning decisions. Their instinct was to trust local government so little that under the original proposals, major planning decisions would have been pushed through parliamentary Committees with little more than an hour's debate—decisions on pylons, incinerators, railways, housing estates and other large infrastructure projects. That led one environmental coalition to publish an advert that summed up the reduced influence of local people with a picture and a slogan, "Your new power station goes here. What colour would you like the gates?" I am glad to say that the Deputy Prime Minister appears to have pulled back from the brink on that heavy-handed, unworkable proposal. Unfortunately, he replaced it with something almost as bad.

The Deputy Prime Minister now has the power to appoint inspectors, conciliators and advisers, and to set the timetable and the evidence taken for any large-scale planning application—and all as the result of one statutory instrument, on which there was 90 minutes' debate. That is control-freakery on the highest scale.

The Government's instinctive lack of trust in local government is bad for the environment, bad for business and bad for democracy. It is bad for the environment because their proposals will impose incinerators, pylons, railways, housing on green fields regardless of local opinion. It is bad for business because the Government will introduce more red tape than they remove. After all,

"extending developers' planning gain obligations will be the equivalent of introducing a stealth tax on regeneration."

Those are not my words, but those of the CBI. After strong opposition from Opposition Members, the Deputy Prime Minister at least dropped the absurd tariff proposals, which would have constituted a stealth tax on development.

The Government's instinctive lack of trust in local government is bad for democracy because planning decisions will be snatched away from local people and granted to remote regions and a distant Whitehall. That is the purpose of the planning Bill. By itself, it will not create a single new house or bring back into use a single new patch of brownfield land. It will not devolve power, but grab it back. The same is true of the local government Bill.

We in the House forget too easily how much progress in this country was achieved by local government. Its institutions brought water supplies, sewers, street lighting, public baths and health services to Britain's cities after the industrial revolution. Local not central government delivered the reduction in infant mortality from 160 deaths per 1,000 births in 1850 to 20 in 1950. All that was done without best value initiatives, central targets, performance indicators and the like.

David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire): Would the right hon. Gentleman have the grace to concede that those very substantial municipal gains were also made in the teeth of opposition from his parliamentary predecessors in the Conservative party?

David Davis: That certainly not true. What I am talking about was often done by Conservative council leaders. However, if the hon. Gentleman wants to try to score points, I recommend that he perhaps start by reading the evidence given to the Select Committee on Transport, Local Government and the Regions when it considered the local government Bill. For example, Professor Travers pointed out only too clearly that the centralisation trends since the last war have been characteristic of all parties, and it is not particularly smart for one party to claim a monopoly of virtue. We have to recognise that there are benefits and virtues to be encouraged.

We support changes that will truly give power to local people, allowing them to take more decisions and empowering local representatives to deliver. Never were such plans more needed. Year after year, the Government have tied up councils with best value, comprehensive performance assessments, inspection regimes and red tape. Whitehall tells local authorities how to spend an ever growing proportion of their money.

In 1997, ring-fenced grants represented 4 per cent. of total central support for local authorities. The figure is now 15 per cent.—nearly four times higher. Local councils today are judged against 130 specific performance indicators. They must agree up to 46 plans with Whitehall, covering everything from pipeline safety to minerals extraction. They are monitored by four different inspection regimes, which cost roughly £600 million a year. The Government's response to all this is not to set local Government free, but to strengthen the grip of Whitehall.

Mr. Clive Betts (Sheffield, Attercliffe): Does the right hon. Gentleman welcome the proposals to increase resources for planning departments, after years of cuts under the previous Government? Does he welcome the proposals for prudential guidelines on capital spending and extra resources—again, after years of cuts under the previous Conservative Government? Does he also welcome the proposals to allow local authorities to trade more freely, after years of legislation through which the previous Government tried to do everything they could to try to stop local authorities doing precisely that?

David Davis: If I were the former leader of Sheffield city council, I would be very careful about what I said about the virtues of local government.

To address the point made by the hon. Gentleman, I shall start with another quotation:

"The idea that you give freedom to the people who are already achieving is quite perverse." That is not something that would bother the hon. Gentleman. The quotation continues:

"The real issues are the Councils in the middle and the failing ones which actually just need a lot more freedom . . . If government keeps pinning Councils down, they can't do the things they want to do and services won't get better".

The Deputy Prime Minister will recognise that, as it was not my opinion but that of the former director of inspection at the Audit Commission, who now works for him in another context.

The Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. John Prescott): I'll be seeing him tomorrow.

David Davis: The right hon. Gentleman should take his advice.

As the Labour-dominated Select Committee also said:

"The White Paper on which this Bill is based raised considerable expectation about a change in the relations between central and local government. On the whole the draft Bill appears to be far from a radical overhaul and in many cases gives more powers to the Secretary of State".

That further extension of centralisation and control, as bad as it is, is not the main aim of the Bill.

Dr. Alan Whitehead (Southampton, Test): In the light of the right hon. Gentleman's new-found localism, does he accept that there is any role whatever for central Government concerning the support of local government? If so, what is it?

David Davis: Of course the central Government have a role—to a very large extent, the vast majority of local government activities are funded by central Government at the moment. There is also an oversight role, of course, but the difficulty is that in this area, with four different scrutiny regimes and £600 million of expenditure, it is not competent. Is the hon. Gentleman's question serious? If he does not mind, I shall move on, as that is such an obvious point.

The main aim of the Bill, whichever of the three financial options the Government take, is clear: to gerrymander money from well run, high quality Conservative councils, which provide good service, to badly run, low quality, money-wasting, high-taxing, Labour crony councils, which provide poor service. That is the purpose of the local government Bill. It is the kind of gerrymandering that Britain became used to in the days of Dickens: not the best of times, but the worst of times. For people in Labour-controlled areas it may be the season of light, but for those in Conservative-controlled areas it will be the season of darkness—I am sure that the Deputy Prime Minister recognises the quotation to which I refer, and knows what follows it.

Much of this gerrymandering is being done by stealth, such as the plans to pool capital receipts from housing transfers. Of course that is not about devolving power down.

Matthew Green (Ludlow): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

David Davis: Not for the moment.

[David Davis]

This programme reflects the priorities of politicians, not the priorities of people. That brings us to the Deputy Prime Minister's flagship measure—the Regional Assemblies (Preparations) Bill. As I said, we support proposals shaped by democratic principles, which boost economic growth, slash red tape and truly give power to local people.

Mr. Mark Hendrick (Preston): When the right hon. Gentleman talks about gerrymandering, will he refer to the imposition of urban development corporations, which totally bypassed local people and local authorities, and did very little to regenerate the inner cities?

David Davis: I am afraid that the hon. Gentleman has shown that he has just walked in to the Chamber. He missed the first half of my speech, in which I talked about the problems of the previous Administration.

To return to the question of regional assemblies, we talked about ways of supporting people. The Bill will do none of those things. Let us take democratic principles as an example.

Joyce Quin (Gateshead, East and Washington, West): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

David Davis: In a moment.

In a democracy any referendum, especially a referendum that intends to set up a new institution such as a regional assembly, must offer a clear choice. If people are to vote on whether to establish a regional assembly, they should know what they are voting for. What powers will the Assembly have? How many members will it have? How will they be elected? What will be the cost? The order should be straightforward: plan first, referendum second. However, this Bill turns that order on its head. There will be a referendum first and a plan afterwards. The Deputy Prime Minister is asking people to vote for a pig in a poke. When asked about the issue, his Department's answer apparently was, "There has already been a White Paper." It will come as news to Members on both sides of the House that a White Paper and a Bill are now identical.

Let us suppose that the House has the temerity to amend a Bill that creates a regional assembly. People could find that they had voted for one kind of assembly, but got another. That brings me to my first question for the Deputy Prime Minister, and I hope that he will answer it in his speech: if the House amends a Bill, thus altering the proposed structure or powers of any assembly, will the people be allowed another vote, or will they have to take what they are given?

Regional government will do nothing to boost economic growth. Indeed, it may slow it. On the Government's preferred measure of unemployment—the labour force survey—the highest unemployment rate in this country is, surprisingly, in London, at 7 per cent. The second highest rate is in Scotland at 6.5 per cent. London and Scotland may not, at first sight, have all that much in common, and their problems are certainly far from identical. However, the one thing they do have in common is new structures of government, and those structures are slowing down economic growth. In London,

"we are fast approaching a time when the financial pre-eminence of the City may become seriously imperilled."

Those are not my words, but those of Gavyn Arthur, the Lord Mayor of London, about the Deputy Prime Minister's good friend, Ken Livingstone, the Mayor of London. No wonder London is the only area of England where earnings have gone down.

Mr. Salmond: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

David Davis: The hon. Gentleman will have to wait; I have already given way to him once.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. Tony McNulty): Give way. He has a plane to catch.

David Davis: In which case he will need a new ticket—in more ways than one.

It is striking that the gap between the regions in countries with strong regional government has grown wider as the gap between the general economic performance of most countries has got less. No wonder people look to subsidies to close that gap.

Mr. Wayne David (Caerphilly): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

David Davis: No, not for the moment.

Scotland has a Parliament and its public spending is 25 per cent. higher than England's, but the English taxpayer foots the bill. The north-east is likely to be offered an assembly, and the voters there may hope that public spending there may rise closer to Scottish levels, and that taxpayers in the rest of England will foot the bill. That brings me to my second question to the Deputy Prime Minister: will regions that vote for assemblies get more money from the Treasury?

I should tell the Deputy Prime that many people in the north-east are under the impression that they will get more money from the Government if they elect a regional assembly. We do not know where they got that impression. I cannot imagine that Ministers sought to mislead them, so the Deputy Prime Minister can set them right now. Will they or will they not receive extra money?

Regional government will do nothing to boost economic growth, and it could slow it. It will do nothing to slash red tape; indeed, it will increase it. Regional government will usher in a new layer of politicians, and a new layer of bureaucrats, officers, advisers, secretaries, researchers, spin doctors, budgets, expenses, allowances—and trebles all round.Let us not forget the new buildings. Edinburgh and Cardiff are committed to spending £40 million on new buildings but, from my previous role, I have the strong memory that £40 million is the least the buildings will cost. The real cost will be much more than that.Why should the regions be different? For hard-pressed council tax payers, it will be higher council taxes all round.

Above all, regional government will do nothing to give power to local people. Instead, it will take it further away. Decisions made by county councils, which are closer to local communities, will be made by regional assemblies, which are further from local communities. The truth is that there will be no counties. For example, planning decisions now made in Hereford will be taken 60 miles away in Birmingham. Decisions now made in Kendal will be taken 75 miles away in Manchester. Decisions now made in Truro will be taken 90 miles away in Exeter—and all for one simple reason. This Government try to abolish anything that they cannot control.

Mr. Huw Edwards (Monmouth) *rose—*

Mr. Davis: The counties tend to vote Tory so they will be gerrymandered into what the Government hope will be Labour-run regions, even if local people want to keep their counties, boroughs and districts. That brings me to my third question for the Deputy Prime Minister: if a majority in an area vote for a regional assembly but some counties vote overwhelmingly against it, will a regional assembly be imposed on them, against the wishes of their people? Will counties be abolished even if the majority of their residents want to keep them?

Mr. Hilton Dawson (Lancaster and Wyre) *rose—*

Mr. Edwards *rose—*

David Davis: I will not give way.

Institutions must have legitimacy, and that usually takes time. Our counties have legitimacy because they are organic communities, established in the geography and geology, the dialects and architecture, and the customs, practices and traditions of our country. Regions will be nothing more than lines on a map drawn by the stroke of a bureaucrat's pen. They will have no legitimacy whatever, and even less if they are imposed on counties against the will of those who live in them. In England, regions went out in the dark ages. One thing is certain: we on the Conservative Benches will fight undemocratic and costly bureaucratic regional assemblies every inch of the way.

The flagship Bill of the Queen's Speech could have been one that dealt with the real pressing problems in this country. It could have made every hospital a foundation hospital, given heads the final right to exclude pupils, offered treatment to all young heroin and cocaine addicts, or extended the right to buy to all housing association tenants. Instead, the flagship Bill of the Queen's Speech will destroy our historic counties and create a new layer of government. It will employ fresh armies of bureaucrats, create new reams of red tape, impose a new tier of politicians on local people and place new burdens on business. It will not correct the democratic deficit in Britain. It will not answer the West Lothian question. It will not create a single new doctor, teacher, nurse or policeman. All it will do is waste the time of the House, consume the energy of Ministers and distract the attention of the Deputy Prime Minister which should be focused like a laser beam on the firefighters' strike.

The Deputy Prime Minister's Bills share a single theme: the Orwellian division between claiming to devolve power while actually grabbing it back. Conservative Members will not only oppose the Bill; we will fight to ensure that real power is given back to the people, where it belongs.

4.57 pm

The Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. John Prescott): The right hon. Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr. Duncan Smith) can go to bed early tonight. Indeed, if he hears that speech he will get to sleep much quicker.

In line with my undertaking to keep the House informed, I will briefly update hon. Members on the fire dispute. I am grateful to the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden (David Davis) for requesting information on that. I can say from experience that I will certainly need the best of fortune.

The House knows that we have done all we can over recent weeks to avert a fire strike, which we managed to do until the two-day stoppage last week. The House will want to thank the armed forces and the police in particular, and the other emergency services, for the great job they did last week. I also want to thank the public for heeding the safety warnings we issued. Incidents and calls were both down on normal times.

I am doing all I can to avert the eight-day stoppage planned from this Friday. If a two-day strike was unnecessary and unjustifiable, an eight-day strike is even more so. It must be the Government's goal to prevent it from going ahead. Yet again, I call on the Fire Brigades Union to cancel its eight-day strike.

Yesterday I held talks with the employers and the union, and this morning with Sir George Bain. I will continue my discussions later today. I am hopeful that the employers and the FBU can make good progress in their talks today and tomorrow. I have made it clear that any pay rise above inflation must be linked to modernisation. Sir George Bain has given us a route map to achieve that.

As I and, indeed, the Prime Minister and the Chancellor have repeatedly made clear, the issues involved are relevant to the whole public sector, to people's mortgages, to their jobs and to the strength of our economy at a time of world downturn, as the Chancellor highlighted to the House yesterday. Our three responsibilities are, first, to seek to avert the strike; secondly, to make all necessary preparations should it go ahead; and thirdly, to ensure value for public money by giving a fair deal to the fire service and a fair deal to the public who fund it. I am sure that the House would want me to use all efforts to avoid a strike and its consequences, and I will keep it informed of progress.

Today's debate is about those factors that affect the quality of life of individuals and our communities.

Mr. Salmond: I saw the Deputy Prime Minister speaking on television on Sunday about his visit to his local fire station. The impression given, certainly in reports, was that some of the firefighters thought that the Deputy Prime Minister and the Prime Minister were not fully at one on the dispute. How was that impression conveyed and why was it gained?

The Deputy Prime Minister: That was not the impression given; those were not the exact circumstances. I note that an FBU union official made that point, and I leave the hon. Gentleman to make judgments on that.

[The Deputy Prime Minister]

It was rather touching to hear the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden calling for a new localism, but we must judge that against his record. He was a member of the last Government for a long time. When he talked about giving power to local people he was certainly was not talking about giving money because in the last four years of local authority finance deals under the Tories, there was a 4 per cent. cut in real terms. Compare that with the first four years of this Labour Administration, who gave a 20 per cent. increase in resources. Resources are quite important if there is to be power, decision making and services in a local area.

The right hon. Gentleman asked us to trust local authorities and wondered why we do not do so. The previous Administration's record had nothing to do with trust. They did not give enough resources, and against the wishes of the people of London, Humberside, Berkshire and Cleveland, they abolished county councils. I can remember the arguments on the Floor of the House about people wanting to keep their local authorities—all Tory local authorities, of course; that was why they wanted to keep them. That did not stop the then Government abolishing county councils. Yet the right hon. Gentleman now says, "Let us trust the people and listen to their views." I am afraid that his record does not bear out his claims for himself.

I am sure that we will have many debates about devolution and regional government. When the right hon. Gentleman talks of bureaucracy, he should remember that his Government set up an unaccountable regional bureaucracy. They sent a considerable number of civil servants to every region—every Department was represented—but they could not bring themselves to make those civil servants accountable to the people of the regions. So the right hon. Gentleman should not talk to me about trusting the voice of the people in the regions. Under his Government there was no accountability whatever.

When I made my statement to the House about communities in July—I hope to come to the House in January to complete the statement on housing provision—I said that all Governments, both Labour and Tory, had totally failed the people of this country as regards the provision of housing. Let us look at the figures. In the 1960s, there was a total of 1.2 million social housing units. In the 1970s, that figure was 1.1 million. During both those periods there were Labour and Tory Governments, so I do not seek to make the point that one was better than the other. There was a decline throughout those decades. By the 1980s, the figure had fallen from 1.1 million to 440,000, and in the 1990s it collapsed to 256,000. Social housing provision is the most important aspect of housing programmes.

The right hon. Gentleman talked about the right to buy. Yes, there were about 1 million right-to-buy cases—something like 50,000 a year—but at the same time we saw a fall of almost 1 million in the number of new houses. The right hon. Gentleman might be concerned about providing social and new housing, but the right to buy does not achieve that. We do not oppose the fact that it gives people a property right, but it is more important, especially in areas of housing crisis, to provide new houses.

David Davis: The right hon. Gentleman is the one who raised the question of the right to buy in areas of housing stress where there are shortages of affordable social housing. Does he deny that had his Government carried on for the past five years at the 1997 rate—we are talking about now, not ancient history—there would be 35,000 more social houses?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I presume that the right hon. Gentleman is arguing that capital receipts might be used to buy houses, and he has a fair point. When we discussed the matter, he said that he was going to send me his plan on that, but it has still not arrived. I look forward to its arrival, as we must have a proper debate on the subject. It is an important issue and we intend to enter into a debate on it. As the right hon. Gentleman knows, I will make a fuller statement in January on the community plan and how we will allocate resources to social housing and to housing provision generally. He well knows that the situation is different in different parts of the country. The previous Administration's right-to-buy legislation exempted rural areas where that right could be considered a threat to the provision of housing. The position was not felt to be the same in urban areas, but there is a powerful case to be made for certain areas of London with a housing crisis. I intend to claim for urban areas the rights that have been claimed for rural areas.

The right hon. Gentleman said an awful lot about giving housing associations the right to buy. We shall wait for the plans which he suggested at his party conference were part of a new policy. The proposal is in fact not new—it was proposed by Mrs. Thatcher in 1979 and, I believe, by the right hon. Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague). The trouble, however, is implementation. Housing charities have real difficulties with the long-term financing of housing—I am sure we all agree about that. The proposal was good for conference, but there was not much action—it was just about getting conference going.

David Davis: Will the right hon. Gentleman answer my question? There has been a shortfall of 35,000 in the last five years in the creation of new social housing. The right hon. Gentleman has been blaming the right to buy for the fact that his Government have presided over a trebling of the number of people in bed-and-breakfast accommodation to 12,000. The social housing shortfall is three times that number—35,000—so why is he not building enough houses?

The Deputy Prime Minister: That is a good point, and I accept the criticism. I admitted in my last statement in the House that the amount of new social housing continued to fall under Labour Governments as well. Although it does not excuse the fact that we are not building enough houses, there is a fundamental difference: the right hon. Gentleman's Government kept £5 billion in capital receipts from local authorities' sale of houses, but would not allow them to buy more houses. I acknowledge the right hon. Gentleman's interesting idea, but if the available capital receipts

could be used to build more houses, why were capital receipts of more than £5 billion from the sale of houses not used to provide new houses under the Conservative Administration? We dealt with that problem and put an equivalent sum into refurbishing well over 1 million council houses, whereas the right hon. Gentleman refused local authorities the right or resources to improve housing. That is the difference in our approach.

We can argue about differences in our approach to housing, but I shall repeat what I told the Opposition last July. It would be better if Members on both sides of the House got together and agreed that having the right to live in a house—a right that is denied to too many people—is important for communities. Where we have the political will to do better—this applies to all political parties and Governments—we can make fundamental changes. When I make my statement in January, I hope that we can reach agreement about how we will achieve the plan instead of getting into party political business—we can all do that, but it does not build one more house.

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West): Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that one of the least eligible forms of tenure is ownership of a mobile home? Many park owners have neither the social nor the managerial skills to make a success of it, but have the whip hand over the tenants and can make their lives a misery. Why is there nothing in the Queen's Speech about new contractual arrangements which could bring much relief to those people?

The Deputy Prime Minister: The Queen's Speech, as I shall mention later, does include some powers over landlords, and we are reviewing the position on mobile homes. Without doubt, there is an awful lot to be done, and we shall continue the debate. But to my mind we must deal first with the problem of landlords exploiting rented houses through housing finance, and the legislation contains powers to enable us to begin to do so.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

The Deputy Prime Minister: Like everyone else, I have had a warning from you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I have given way to quite a few Members and must get on with my speech.

On 18 July, I made a statement to the House about the need for a step change in the delivery of new sustainable communities in which people are proud to live. The Queen's Speech made it clear that a strong and free society founded on rights and responsibilities is at the heart of the Government's agenda. We believe that a strong society cannot exist without a strong sense of community. As the Prime Minister made clear in his introduction, rights and responsibilities go hand in hand at every level.

Our planning framework, about which the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden said a considerable amount, is now further reformed and has already begun to change our communities, including those aspects to which he referred. We had a target of 60 per cent of all new homes being built on brownfield land. That target has been achieved eight years ahead of time. That is something to be proud of. Thirty thousand hectares have been added to the green belt. That is a considerable change and never happened under the previous Administration. We have tougher controls on out-of-town shopping. In 2000, for the first time since the 1980s, we achieved more in-town than out-of-town retail development.

If we compare the number of social houses built in the 1960s with the number built in the 1990s, we can see that year on year, we are building almost 100,000 fewer social houses than we were 30 years ago, as I said earlier.

Mr. Dawson: Does my right hon. Friend accept that a properly regulated park homes system could make a major contribution to the development of affordable housing, particularly in the countryside? Will he agree not to take any lessons about park homes from the Opposition, who left 200,000 people vulnerable by their failure to regulate the sector properly? Will he assure me that he will try to bring forward the excellent work that has been done under this Government—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. The hon. Gentleman is forgetting the advice given to the House yesterday by Mr. Speaker.

The Deputy Prime Minister: I agree with a great deal of what my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster and Wyre (Mr. Dawson) said. I may have a vested interest, as we have one of the biggest producers of caravans in my area, as does the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden in his. I recognise that there is a great need for regulation of the sector.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

The Deputy Prime Minister: No, I must make progress. I may come back to the hon. Gentleman later, if he will give me some time.

As well as providing more resources, we are speeding up the delivery of affordable homes. The Housing Corporation has been given the go-ahead to fast-track 4,400 new homes to be built in London and the south-east; 2,800 of those homes will be for key public sector workers. Together with the approved development programme, the Housing Corporation will deliver more than 22,000 homes in 2003–04, but that is not enough, by any definition. There clearly is a problem, as I have outlined.

In the Queen's Speech it was announced that the housing Bill will be published in draft to allow the Select Committee the opportunity for pre-legislative scrutiny. The Bill will improve the standards of management of private rented accommodation, with selective licensing of private landlords in key areas and a reformed housing fitness regime. The Bill will also introduce a compulsory home seller's pack in order to tackle the stress and expense suffered by hundreds of thousands of house buyers each year when home sales fall through or are delayed.

In my statement to the House on 18 July, I outlined my intention to publish the details of our communities programme in the new year. That programme will set out the details: further reform of the planning system; action to tackle the housing shortage in London and the south-east; and plans to revitalise the communities

[The Deputy Prime Minister]

suffering low demand in the north and the midlands. That complements the plans of my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary for a White Paper followed by a Bill to tackle antisocial behaviour. That will require a partnership between national Government, local government and neighbourhoods to stamp out antisocial behaviour. The measures set out in the Queen's Speech will help our communities to grow and flourish.

Fundamental to any community is the quality of public services—schools, health centres and safe and reliable transport. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport will speak later about a Bill to create an independent body to deal with safety and investigating accidents. Equally important is the quality of the environment. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs will introduce measures to promote better management of our waste and our water supply and to combat climate change.

In the previous Parliament, the Government gave the people of Scotland, Wales and London the power to take more decisions for themselves. Interestingly enough, each of those measures was opposed by the Opposition, and interestingly enough, each was accepted and endorsed after it had been introduced. I suspect that they will take exactly the same approach to regional government. I am delighted to tell the House that our Bill on referendums will give the same choice to the people of the English regions, and not before time.

Regions, if their people so choose—hon. Members tell us that we should trust the people—will be given a distinct political voice and a real say over decisions that matter to them. Elected assemblies will take functions from Whitehall and its agencies, not from local authorities. For the first time, regions will have a responsibility to take greater control over things that matter to people—economic development, regeneration, planning, housing, transport, health, culture and the environment. That is what we intend to bring about with our regional proposals.

Mr. George Osborne (Tatton): The Deputy Prime Minister says that we should trust the people. Will he confirm that even if every single person in Cheshire, Lancashire and Cumbria votes against a regional assembly and the abolition of their counties, those counties will be abolished and the regional assembly will be imposed if the people in Manchester and Merseyside vote for them?

The Deputy Prime Minister: We will provide the opportunity of a referendum if we decide that enough people want it. We will then give people an opportunity to decide not only whether they want regional government, but what kind of unitary government they want. In the circumstances, a two-tier system would be the only possibility. People would know that they would be voting for regional government alongside unitary government, which would leave out the counties. We would be abolishing a tier—a bit like the last Administration.

Mr. Bercow: May I ask the right hon. Gentleman to retrace his steps briefly? What assessment has he made of the impact of changes in the rules governing the use of capital receipts from the sale of council houses on the size of payments of interest on local authority debt?

The Deputy Prime Minister: That is an important question, to which the Select Committee addressed itself. It is a difficult one. We came to office saying that the receipts should be released to allow the refurbishment of housing. Owing to the debts incurred by some local authorities and the interest payments involved, we decided that the Treasury should provide more money and that some capital receipts should be retained. We did not take all the capital receipts. Money was made available to the Treasury, and all our actions were influenced by the level of interest and the level of Government debt. The Select Committee was anxious to achieve a balance between debts and capital asset receipts, especially in the context of housing. I realise that these are complex and difficult matters.

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): May I return to the question of the regions? If the Government are so keen to set up regional assemblies, why do they not positively advocate that local people choose regions, rather than maintaining a studied neutrality?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I have never been accused of studied neutrality, particularly where local government is concerned. Perhaps my hon. Friend has not often listened to what I say. I clearly advocate the case, and I will do so during a referendum. Is that clear enough for my hon. Friend?

Mr. Prentice: No, it is not.

The Deputy Prime Minister: Good.

The Queen's Speech included the announcement of a Bill to reform the planning system. Despite past attempts to reform the planning system—I think all Governments have had a go at it from time to time—it is still too slow and inflexible. The right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden (David Davis) made a number of points about that. The planning process, along with the culture of planning itself, needs to change. Ninety per cent. of councils fail to meet the targets for dealing with planning applications, and 47 councils still have no up-to-date development plans. I know that that is sometimes to do with resources, and sometimes to do with personnel. That is why we have had to address ourselves to the requirement for resources that were often cut under the last Administration because of the lack of resources given to that Administration.

The planning Bill will establish the reforms needed to overhaul the system and increase effective community involvement. It will streamline the system and introduce a single level of plans, with strategic planning at regional level. It will also introduce business planning zones, and establish new processes to speed up the handling of applications for major infrastructure projects.

Reform of the planning system is urgent, and this Government recognise that it requires new and additional resources. We do not just say that something needs to be done; we provide the necessary resources. Our announcement in July of a £350 million investment

in the planning system over the next three years is, I think, unprecedented. Furthermore, £50 million will be released to allow urgent work to start immediately. The extra money will go to authorities that demonstrate their commitment to high-quality planning. I will not hesitate to take action against authorities that are not performing adequately.

In future, the planning system will help to deliver priority services to our communities: new homes, new schools, new hospitals and a reliable, safe public transport system—all in a clean and safe environment.

Lawrie Quinn (Scarborough and Whitby): My right hon. Friend mentioned bringing the planning system closer to the community. I understand that the Bill envisages an improved role for town and parish councils. Does my right hon. Friend expect any resources to be provided for training and skills at that important level of local government?

The Deputy Prime Minister: We are concerned about the position at parish council level. I have always argued that parish councils could do a lot more about some of their own facilities: village hall developments and things like that. There is more to be done on that. There are pilot proposals on how that may operate and work. The more chance people have to make a decision that affects their communities and their lives, whether at parish or at urban level, the better. We are actively developing pilot proposals to achieve that.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): Will the Deputy Prime Minister consider, even at this late stage, the fact that he will be asking for regional plans only when regional assemblies have been given backing by the local electorate and that until such time as regional assemblies have been given that backing, the county structure plan will stay with elected county councillors?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman knows this but those bodies are staffed by an awful lot of Tory-elected councillors, as well as Labour-elected councillors, and I do not think that they have heard the message from here that they should not be co-operating. Even in Beverley, the leader of the council, Councillor Parnaby, sits on the assembly. We will give the opportunity for people to be elected to a body, a regional government, but in the meantime we think that regional assemblies have a role to play.

We have given resources to check what the RDAs are doing. They can play a part in regional planning. We think that they have a role to play and so, apparently, do many Tory councillors. Although they obviously hear a different view here, they are prepared to concentrate on what they do and get actively involved.

The House will agree that strong local government is essential for successful and thriving communities. Local government needs to deliver the quality of services that people expect and to have the resources for that. I have pointed out the greater importance we give to providing resources—as opposed to discovering in opposition that local authorities are important.

Much has been achieved. The average performance of 80 per cent. of all councils is improving and in many areas the gap between the best and worst councils is closing. We have strengthened the Audit Commission's role to produce comprehensive performance assessments for local authority activities. Those assessments will for the first time give us a baseline to judge each council's performance. We will reward the best, provide support, tackle weaknesses and intervene where necessary.

The local government Bill was published in draft in July and benefited from consultation and scrutiny by the Select Committee. I am grateful for what the Select Committee did in examining the Bill. I always have trouble with Select Committees; it goes with the job. They make criticisms—they are there to do that. Sometimes, I like a bit of praise, but you cannot ask for too much.

I have always been an advocate of the pre-scrutiny of Bills. It would be good if Bills were examined by a Select Committee before they came to the House. The Government may agree or disagree with the Select Committee; we may have another opinion, which is usually well founded. There is a lot of information and evidence, which I think has been cited by the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden, and on which the House can make a judgment when the Bill comes before it.

Our response to the Select Committee was placed in the Library on, I think, 5 November. I am grateful for the work of the Select Committee. We have adopted its recommendations where possible, and rejected them where we disagree. I strongly reject the view that we have created more power in central Government or created more burdens for councils—the right hon. Member made the charge that we do not trust local government.

The Bill offers new flexibility and extends the freedoms available to local government. I believe that it will free successful councils to innovate and to make real improvements in local services and the quality of life in communities; there is considerable evidence to show that it will. New borrowing powers will give local authorities the option to fund capital projects where they have the means to pay back the borrowing. Local authorities will have the power to charge for discretionary services and will be able to trade in any service in which they have demonstrated a strong performance on delivery.

The Bill will give local authorities greater freedom, allowing them to end the 50 per cent. council tax discount for second homes and long-term homes: they will be allowed to reduce the discount to 10 per cent. That will give extra income to local authorities of approximately £65 million, which they will be able to use to improve local services.

Norman Lamb (North Norfolk): I am pleased that the 50 per cent. discount will be abolished, or at least that councils will be given the right not to discount the council tax by that much, but why not get rid of it entirely? The notes with the press release talk about an incentive being given to the owners of second homes to come clean. Surely that is not necessary. None of the rest of us has an incentive to comply with the law. Just get rid of it all together.

The Deputy Prime Minister: Well, I think that the judgment has been made. The way to establish a register

[The Deputy Prime Minister]

and to identify such homes is to require at least a 10 per cent. payment; otherwise, we would have to go searching for all those houses. A legal requirement to pay 10 per cent. is a practical measure that enables the keeping of a register, so that local authorities can get their resources.

Mr. Peter Pike (Burnley): In looking at this issue, it is important to recognise that we are talking about a discretion on the part of councils. As my right hon. Friend will recognise, many people in towns such as Burnley cannot sell their homes, and the introduction of 100 per cent. council tax on those homes would constitute a tremendous burden.

The Deputy Prime Minister: My hon. Friend gives a good reason why we leave the matter to the discretion of councils. However, to judge by what I have seen of his constituency—in certain cases, there are terrible circumstances—it would be nice to know who does own their own home. That is one of the problems that the pathfinder scheme that we have implemented in his and other areas seeks to address.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

The Deputy Prime Minister: New business improvement districts will generate a real partnership between business and local authorities, to improve local areas for everyone.

In all these ways, we are continuing to strengthen communities, and to give them a greater say in the decisions that affect them most. That principle is at the centre of the programme of legislation before this House. All of us will need to work together, and to think differently, if we are to make a step change towards building sustainable communities.

We have stability in our economy. We have a generous financial settlement from the Chancellor for regional development agencies, local authorities, housing, planning and regeneration. We have the legislation in the Queen's Speech, and the forthcoming communities plan. With all these measures in place, we have put in hand what is necessary to secure the step change in policy that is required to build successful, thriving and sustainable communities. I ask the House to reject the Opposition's amendment in the Lobby this evening.

5.26 pm

Mr. Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton): The Deputy Prime Minister has stood accused of many things in this House, but one thing that he cannot be accused of is legislative inactivity, whether in the past or the present. In previous roles, he has helped to produce many hefty Green Papers and White Papers, followed by a number of hefty Acts of Parliament. Since he became Deputy Prime Minister in 1997, at least 11 major Bills that he proposed have become Acts. In particular, I remember his legislative tour de force: the Greater London Authority Act 1999, which, I am reliably informed, emerged into the daylight as the longest Act of Parliament since the India Act 1784. I doubt whether he now considers that creation his finest, given the debacle over Ken Livingstone and the sad, ongoing saga of public-private partnership for the tube.

To me, that flawed legislation should be in the minds of the Deputy Prime Minister and his Ministers as they approach the Bills promised in this Queen's Speech. The GLA Bill, like those on regional assemblies and local government reform, promised devolution. Its rhetoric was very much like today's rhetoric on regions and councils. London was going to get its own government; it would regain its freedoms and pride. Yet what did we end up with after three months of trench warfare in Committee? A toothless, hybrid monster, whose parents effectively disowned it almost from birth. The problem then—as now, with the Bills on regional and local government—was that its parents did not want an independent, free-thinking child. They dreaded creating an offspring that might rebel, talk back, and challenge their parental authority. So the Government produced a weakened, malformed creature, with few powers to act and few incentives to grow up.

The 1999 Act not only gave few powers away; it contained almost as many references to the Secretary of State as to the Mayor of London. The lack of trust that produced such weak devolution has resulted in weak government in London. I am afraid that the London experience may well be repeated in the Deputy Prime Minister's programme in this Queen's Speech. Indeed, that is exactly what will happen if the Government continue with their limited vision for regional and local government across Britain.

On regional government, the Government seem not just timid but almost cowardly—or perhaps it is just that the Cabinet cannot agree. There is more than a suspicion that the Deputy Prime Minister is fighting a reluctant Downing street. As for local government, the Government's proposals show a total lack of trust. How can they talk so warmly about partnership with councils, when so many of their actions show their disdain for them? Neither of the main Bills for the regions and local government begins to match the rhetoric that has accompanied them.

Before I discuss the Deputy Prime Minister's proposed legislation in more detail, I should like to comment on his update on, and his work on, the fire strikes. We hope that the employers and the Fire Brigades Union will talk, and that they will avoid the threatened eight-day strike. I wish all those involved in trying to prevent that strike the very best. In many ways the fire strike negotiations could have potential legislative implications. I was surprised that the Gracious Speech did not mention some legislation on fire safety.

The basic proposition on the fire strike proposed by the Government and the Deputy Prime Minister is not disputed in many parts of the House. The proposition as I see it is that any pay deal must be accompanied by comprehensive reform of the fire service. There have been many questions and much argy-bargy about the handling of the dispute, but on the central issue of the link between pay and reform there is some agreement. It is more important that we focus on the reform agenda and modernisation because there has been far too much talk about particular pay figures when we still have not had proper discussions about reform. No matter what

the final pay figure is, although it matters hugely for the economy and wider the public sector, modernisation is the key to the dispute. Without wanting to be over-dramatic, the case for modernisation is a case built on saving lives.

Yes, reform might produce efficiency savings, which must be costed to see whether they will help fund the pay increase, but let us remember the stronger case for modernisation and the fact that it could dramatically improve the quality of protection for the public. Reform will save lives. The Government have been too mealy-mouthed in making that case. It may be that they did not want to inflame the dispute or it might have been a negotiating tactic, but as crunch time approaches we need more of the Deputy Prime Minister's famous plain talking on reform.

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Davey: In a moment.

It may be that the FBU has at last come up with its own proposals for reform—good and about time too—but it should be putting those ideas to the Bain review, and from what we have seen of its ideas so far, they do not seem to measure up to the Bain agenda on reform.

Mrs. Dunwoody: In the detailed press notice that the hon. Gentleman is reading with such care does he have space for an insertion on the views of elected Members such as that in industrial disputes people have the right to put their point of view, the right to demand at least some understanding of their position and the right to exercise that under existing trade union law? Also, could he please not read the rest of his speech?

Mr. Davey: I am grateful for that intervention, but I am simply following the lead of the previous two speakers. The hon. Lady is right that there needs to be a negotiated settlement between the employers and the trade union officials. However, the FBU leadership needs to get real about the need for reform and modernisation. Some of the terms and conditions of the fire service in the "Grey Book" are arcane and go back not just to the 1970s but to the immediate post-war period. The FBU needs to grapple with the reform agenda.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. In the circumstances the Chair has allowed reference to the fire dispute for obvious reasons given the concern of the House and the country. However, it is outwith the terms of the amendment under discussion and I hope that we will now move away from that subject.

Mr. Davey: I am more than happy to do that. I simply wanted to respond because the Queen's Speech talks about a range of public service reforms, and that public service needs massive reform.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman does not need to justify himself to the Chair. I am simply suggesting that we should draw a line under that subject.

Mr. Davey: I suppose we should be surprised that the Queen's Speech contains no surprises. Much of the legislation has been trailed. We have seen the draft local government Bill, which was welcome and we are now to see the draft housing Bill. I congratulate the Government on publishing their legislation in draft form as it is helpful. We must hope that that will lead to better parliamentary drafting and more consultation, but I am concerned that the content will not improve.

Let us start with the Regional Assemblies (Preparations) Bill, which has already been published. The Liberal Democrats are, and have been for many years, strong advocates of regional government. My immediate predecessor with responsibility for regional government, my hon. Friend the Member for Bath (Mr. Foster), published detailed proposals and won our party conference's support for them. I am indebted to him for that work, because it enables me to compare the Government's programme with our own. On Second Reading next week, I hope to make that comparison in more detail.

I have two points to make tonight about that little Bill. First, and bizarrely, the Bill would allow referendums to be held before the final decisions have been made about the powers for the regions, as the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden (David Davis) said. Nowhere in the Bill does it say that the House must have decided what powers it will give to regional assemblies before people are asked about them. Ministers might refer people to the White Paper, "Your Region, Your Choice", but since when has a White Paper—which is subject to consultation and change by Parliament—established legal powers? It is a strange notion of democracy to ask people to vote for something that has not yet been decided. It is like holding elections when the parties have not got round to finalising their manifestos. On second thoughts, perhaps that is where the Government started.

Mr. Bercow: Given the hon. Gentleman's avowed commitment to localism, does he accept that most people's primary loyalties are to their village, their town, their district, their borough or their county, but not to amorphous monstrosities, otherwise known as regions?

Mr. Davey: I am grateful for that helpful intervention. Of course people support their local communities, possibly more than they do regions or other tiers of government. However, it is nonsense to suggest that there is no demand for regional government in many parts of the country. The hon. Gentleman has only to visit the north-east, Yorkshire and other regions to see that.

Mr. Gordon Prentice: The Member for Yeovil in the last Parliament said that that Commons is too big and its membership should be reduced. What is Liberal Democrat policy on the creation of regional assemblies? Should there be a corresponding reduction in the size of membership of this House?

Mr. Davey: We have argued for just such a reduction.

The Deputy Prime Minister is doing down his own cause as a proponent of regionalism. If we had a referendum campaign, it would soon become clear that people were being asked a hollow question, with no clarity. I cannot think of a better weapon to give to the

[Mr. Davey]

opponents of devolution. The strategy of failing to set out the powers of the assemblies before the referendum is counterproductive to the right hon. Gentleman's aims.

The Deputy Prime Minister: Would the hon. Gentleman vote for or against a regional assembly, given the opportunity?

Mr. Davey: We will vote for regional assemblies, but we will also make detailed criticisms of the Regional Assemblies (Preparations) Bill. It has a second major failing that the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden did not mention. By tying a referendum on a regional assembly to local government restructuring, the Government are shooting themselves in the foot again. The most recent experience of such restructuring shows that it can be very destabilising, setting council against council, councillor against councillor—often from the same party. The net effect of the coupling of the regional question with local government restructuring will probably be that both are lost, because people who would normally be sympathetic to devolution will fight to preserve powers for their own communities. That is why the Liberal Democrats believe that the two issues should be decoupled. By all means, let us ask local government to restructure, but we should not tie the issue to regional assemblies. At the very least, the Government should ask people two separate questions—one on the regional assembly and one on any proposed local government restructuring. That would be more democratic and more likely to ensure maximum support for future regional assemblies.

Lawrie Quinn: The hon. Gentleman suggests decoupling of the issues. Would he ask areas that already have unitary authorities whether they want secondary or tertiary levels?

Mr. Davey: We shall certainly not propose that they be given the choice to revert. Most unitary authorities have had that debate and have made their choice in the very recent past.

Will the Deputy Prime Minister say when he expects the local government Bill to be published? A lot of work has already been done: a draft Bill was prepared, and the Select Committee published a report to which the Government responded. I hope that the Bill is not too far away from publication.

The Deputy Prime Minister: It will happen soon.

Mr. Davey: That is helpful. In fact, all the work that has already been done gives us an idea about what the Bill will contain, so we can talk about it in some detail. Many aspects are welcome, but it is extremely disappointing overall.

As I said earlier, the Bill is built on distrust of local government. I am not alone in thinking that, because, as the Deputy Prime Minister admitted, the Select Committee was very worried about that. It stated in its report:

"The Government promised to redress the balance between central and local government. The Bill fails to achieve that. It makes some small steps in the right direction, but at the same time increases the power of the Secretary of State...Central Government seems to be terrified of trusting local authorities and allowing them their independence."

That is from an all-party Select Committee. In addition, the local government information unit published earlier this year its commission on local governance report entitled "Free To Differ". The report looked at the White Paper proposals on which the Bill is based, and stated:

"We have been left with misgivings that the proposals in the White Paper will not be sufficient to counter the trend of increasing centralisation and diminishing responsibility for local government."

Is there anything good about the White Paper and the draft Bill? Yes, there is. The prudential capital regime is welcome. Liberal Democrat Members have pushed for abolishing controls on council borrowing and for the proposed system of credit approvals, and unequivocally welcome them. However, those new freedoms will be coupled with some worrying new powers for the Secretary of State. The draft Bill makes it clear that there will be special powers—unconstrained powers—to intervene in any local authority's ability to borrow. Intervention will not be possible only in special circumstances defined in the legislation, but can be undertaken at the Secretary of State's whim. That is a real concern.

In addition to the powers to intervene over borrowing, the Bill will contain new powers to intervene in connection with minimum reserves, and its proposals to pool capital receipts could have some bizarre effects. Those pooling proposals give us real cause for concern. In some cases, they could act as a disincentive for councils to become free of debt or to manage their asset portfolios efficiently. That cannot be right, and we shall seek significant changes in that regard.

We welcome the Government's change of heart over their original proposals to merge the revenue support grant with national non-domestic rates. That shows the value of consultation. As the Deputy Prime Minister has realised, the proposals would have reduced transparency, and I am glad that he has dispensed with them. However, the Bill contains no proposals for returning business rates to councils, either in their current form or reformed as we propose. I am afraid that that lack has not been welcomed by people in the local government family up and down the country.

We welcome the ideas on business improvement districts. Some time ago, indeed, Lord Ashdown, our party's former leader, was one of the first to advocate such districts.

We welcome some of the muted reforms to council tax. The abolition of the council tax benefits subsidy limitation comes not before time. As my hon. Friend the Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb) noted in an intervention, we welcome the fact that local authorities will be given some discretion about removing the council tax discount on second homes. However, we are concerned about the retention of the mandatory 10 per cent., and we are not convinced by the Government's arguments on that.

Liberal Democrat Members would prefer much more radical reform. The council tax should be abolished and we believe that local income tax should be introduced. That tax is fair and related to a person's ability to pay.

It is surprising that a Labour Government should stick with the Tory council tax, which is increasingly being shown to be one of the most regressive forms of tax imaginable. It is the next most regressive form of tax after the poll tax. Rising council tax rates place an especially damaging burden on the poor and the nearly poor in our society. I am sure that hon. Members of all parties will recognise that trend from their constituency mail bags.

The local government Bill contains some welcome measures, but they do not add up to very much. With their comprehensive performance assessment exercise, the Government are sending a clear signal to local government up and down the country that, at best, they do not care much for local government and that, at worst, they hold it in contempt. We should consider for a moment the comprehensive performance assessment process. Liberal Democrats had concerns about that from the start. A one size fits all model of inspection for councils across the country is not good enough. The costs are huge, and many of us doubt whether central Government telling local government what it should prioritise from start to finish has anything to do with local democracy.

The allegations in last week's *Local Government Chronicle* provided the final nail in the coffin of this discredited exercise. It suggested that Ofsted's rankings of the performance of local education authorities were better than expected. Presumably, that should have been welcomed in Downing street. One would have thought that No. 10 would be pleased about an independent inspection showing that councils were doing a good job, but no. The better than expected Ofsted rankings implied that, under the Government's comprehensive performance assessment process, more councils would be classed as excellent or good, but No. 10 did not want a positive local government story. It is alleged that pressure was brought to bear by No. 10 to alter the provisional figures of the independent Audit Commission.

There are serious allegations that No. 10 did not celebrate success in education, interfered with the work of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and bullied the Audit Commission, which is the public's independent watchdog. Those allegations must be answered. If they are not answered, the view that the Government want to rubbish local government, not set it free, will be reinforced. They want to hold on to power, not to empower local communities. Ministers should be concerned about that.

What about other promised legislation? The planning Bill may be some way off, but that is probably just as well. It would seem from the Gracious Speech that the sole aim of reforming the planning system is to speed it up. Surely there are other issues to consider. What about central Government letting go? The Deputy Prime Minister recently made the bizarre decision to turn down the proposed IKEA investment near Stockport, which the town was banking on to bring new jobs and regeneration to the area. Was that done for good planning or environmental reasons, or was it really about political manipulation from the centre yet again?

However we reform the planning system, it is vital that central Government butt out when these decisions are made. The Government's involvement in planning decisions has shown that central Government are the real block and the cause of delay in the planning system. Reducing central Government's involvement could be the best thing they could do to speed up decisions. If planning was thereby more accountable to local and regional decision makers, so much the better. We await the publication of the Bill with interest, because as always the devil will be in the detail.

As for the draft housing Bill, it is likely that it will contain much that Liberal Democrats can support. We need to change the regulatory system for houses in multiple occupation, because in many areas they are among the most unfit and dangerous properties in the private sector. When we consider the crisis in the affordable housing market, I doubt whether the Bill will be seen to contribute much.

Local government and campaigners for regional government are not enthused about the Queen's Speech. Far from marking a major new stage in the devolution agenda, it tries to set strict limits on it. That is bad news for communities up and down the country, and bad news for a vibrant, pluralist democracy.

5.48 pm

Mrs. Gwyneth Dunwoody (Crewe and Nantwich): Parliament has long provided a platform for the inadequate, the inarticulate and those who read with excellence, so I hope that I will be forgiven if I do not dwell for too long on the problems of the Liberal Democrat party.

A Queen's Speech at this important juncture in the second Session of a Parliament should give us a clear idea of where the Government intend to go and what important matters need to be discussed and proposed. Like the curate's egg, the Queen's Speech is good only in parts. It will come as no surprise to my right hon. and hon. Friends to learn that I view the proposal for foundation hospitals with unalloyed horror. I have no desire to go back 30 years. The idea is a throwback to the situation that existed in the national health service when I worked in it. That was so long ago that all the members of my family who were born subsequently are now rather superior 40-year-olds who have their own views on these matters. Foundation hospitals are unworkable, divisive and unhelpful and they will drain from all the rest of the health service elements of finance that it desperately needs to catch up and has only recently begun to acquire.

It is important to consider what is not in the Queen's Speech as well as what is. We are now so modern, of course, and many of the contents of the speech are trailed with such enthusiasm, that I assume that we may soon get to the point where Her Majesty—as she has very intelligent grandchildren—will decide not to come here in person but to text what she has to say. We will then be able to take part in an e-discussion of government. The reality—

David Taylor: How about a virtual Black Rod?

Mrs. Dunwoody: That thought fills me with unmitigated interest.

The Queen's Speech contains some very useful measures. I think that everyone will welcome the railway safety Bill. It is long overdue. The railway system has

[Mrs. Dunwoody]

been dealt with very haphazardly and has suffered because so many contractors have been brought in to undertake tasks, which has raised in the minds of the general public, if not of hon. Members, considerable doubts as to whether the railway safety system any longer meets the needs of the 21st century. The old railway inspectorate, which dealt with a highly integrated system under British Rail, knew how to disperse important railway safety information throughout the system rapidly, and did so in a way that ensured that people knew about any problems that had arisen anywhere in the system very early on. Once we began to bring in private companies, which all had personal interests and legal responsibilities, and which were different from the old integrated BR, that was not the case. I look forward to that Bill and I hope that it will be introduced as soon as possible.

I would have liked to see some other measures in the Queen's Speech. For example, it is a shame that we are still waiting for the aviation White Paper. Given the length of time that it takes, it would have helped to push forward major decisions on airports, runways and the expansion of aviation if that White Paper had not only been discussed in considerable detail by the general public but had had decisions taken on it. It would have been helpful to have a clear plan on aviation to help us to decide where we want to go.

In the brief time available, I will raise one or two problems and ask some questions. I understand that there is something now called a concordat between the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the Department for Transport, as to those who are taking responsibility for particular transport policies. I am not sure what a concordat is—it smacks slightly of a medieval carve-up, but I am sure that that is not the situation. That means that some questions will be raised in the House. Does it mean that the 11-strong Treasury team who are now deeply involved in transport decisions will in future be prepared to come before Select Committees, such as that on transport, which will want to question them on decisions that are being taken? Does that mean that when we discuss the amount of money that is available for the railway system we shall have access not only to the views of the Department for Transport, but to those of DEFRA?

One of the few advantages of the enormous Department that my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister used to run was that there was an attempt to marry environmental and transport needs and to come up with some sensible answers. It seems that that will not be quite so easy in future. So what is the concordat, what does it cover, will Treasury team members be available for questioning, and is it clear that not only DEFRA but the Department for Transport and the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister will be taking decisions in this field in the future?

I must touch briefly on what is now an urgent problem in the railways. The present Secretary of State took over an extremely muddled and complex situation. He has not only made considerable strides in sorting out the practical problems but has a clear idea of where he wants to go. He will forgive me, therefore, if I point out one or two of the problems that have arisen.

First, there seems to be a difficulty with the Strategic Rail Authority. We needed the SRA and it was set up with some new executives and appeared to be carrying out an interesting clean sweep of the relationships between the train operating companies and the individuals concerned at every level. Since the demise of Railtrack, however, there have been one or two signals that have not contributed much to the clarity of the situation. For example, it is not particularly helpful for Sir Richard Bowker to suggest, as he did in an article at the weekend, that what is happening in the rail industry is nationalisation by the back door. That is not the case. It is not happening and, frankly, it is not constructive to suggest that it is.

Secondly, there is a difficulty with some of the SRA's decisions. I am referring to the decisions on the west coast main line, Stagecoach and Virgin Trains. If it is true, as it appears to be, that Stagecoach and Virgin Trains have been allowed the sort of concessions that add up to a considerable amount of public money, we should have an explanation. In July, a public announcement followed an agreement with the SRA that £106 million would be given to Virgin—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): Order. I am afraid that the hon. Lady's time is up. I remind the House that Mr. Speaker has placed a nine-minute limit on Back-Bench speeches.

5.57 pm

Mr. William Hague (Richmond, Yorks): It is always a great pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody). I share one of her opinions at least—that the Queen's Speech is a strange mixture of measures. We all know what happens. There are months of negotiation between Departments to get measures into the Queen's Speech and then the day before the Queen delivers it the people in No. 10 sit down and say, "What on earth are we going to describe as the main message?" They say, "Well, there is one more Bill from the Home Office than from the other Departments, so this is a Queen's Speech about the criminal justice system." That is how it is spun out to the press and the media. In fact, it is a hotch-potch of different measures, as it often has been under Governments of many different complexions.

I am sorry that the Deputy Prime Minister has just left the Chamber. When I was leading the Opposition I used to tease him every year about not having any legislation in the Queen's Speech. I used to tell him that doing nothing was not an option. Actually, I preferred him when he was doing nothing to when he is promoting the measures in this Queen's Speech, which will not advance the cause of effective government.

I will make some brief general remarks and focus on reviving the rural economy, which is mentioned in the Opposition amendment. I came to the Chamber today in the naïve belief that when food, rural affairs and the environment are listed on the Order Paper, senior Ministers from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs might occasionally wander in and do a passable imitation of listening to the debate. It seems, however, that they are in touch with us from a remote location, or so we must earnestly hope.

In general, the Queen's Speech will not advance the cause of delivering the Government's objectives of reforming the public services and demonstrating that

they have done so over the next few years, because they are not prepared to give the people who work in the public services the independence, the accountability, the local ownership of the problems or the challenges that they need to make those services effective. The Government will increasingly continue to be impatient.

In the press, we are told that the Prime Minister is increasingly impatient for results. He will be more and more impatient as the next year goes by. The Government resemble somebody sitting in a car and pressing hard on the accelerator. They are making the fuel flow in terms of higher and higher public expenditure, but they are unable to understand why the vehicle does not go faster. The reason is that they have left the handbrake on—the control, centralisation and command approach to public servants which means that they will not deliver the desired results, nor will they have done so by the next general election.

One great problem for the Government lies in the fact that in DEFRA no one is even pressing on the accelerator—which is why I am so sorry that no DEFRA Ministers are in the Chamber. Last week, the Department was criticised by an all-party Select Committee which pointed out that the rural White Paper was not being delivered, that the rural proofing of policies was not being attended to, and that the Department is suffering from reorganisation. No doubt, DEFRA is working hard but it has been reorganised.

Once again, part of the Government machinery is suffering from the problem that people sitting in No. 10 Downing street decided that not enough was happening and the Government were not delivering enough results, so the answer was to reorganise Departments. In fact, the answer is hardly ever that Departments should be reorganised. All that happens is that brass plates move around Whitehall, people are reallocated, new titles are devised, new secretaries are appointed and the whole agenda is abandoned for another year.

The tragedy is that that has so often happened in local government, too, under Governments of all persuasions, right back to the 1960s. This might make me seem like the ultimate Conservative, but if we still had urban and rural district councils and the ridings of Yorkshire I am not sure we would be worse off than we are at present—after 30 years of local government reorganisation.

Lawrie Quinn: The right hon. Gentleman, who is my constituency neighbour up in the top corner, mentions rural district councils. He will know of the bitterness felt in Whitby, in my constituency, about what happened in 1974, and of the bitterness still felt throughout our county of North Yorkshire about the Banham review. How does he think such issues affect our locality?

Mr. Hague: It is nice to wave to my neighbour across the Chamber and to agree with him. Obviously, we cannot go back to the 1960s structure of local government, but if we had never embarked on those changes the country would have been much better off. The same is true of more recent local government reorganisations.

Why on earth are we contemplating yet another great reorganisation with regional assemblies on the agenda? People are already sick of elections yet they are now to be presented with another set of elections, even if one layer of authorities is to be abolished. People in North Yorkshire will be told that they can elect a set of people in Leeds, but many of them will not vote; many will regard it as a joke. We have already seen a monkey elected mayor of Hartlepool because the electorate thought it was a joke—no doubt the Deputy Prime Minister would think that all sorts of strange creatures had been elected in Hartlepool in recent years. How many new sets of elections will we devise before we realise that the number of elections, authorities and structures is the problem in governing this country?

Mr. Edwards: The right hon. Gentleman makes a strong case against democratic devolution. As a former Secretary of State, does he—and his party—plan to abolish the Welsh Assembly and the Scottish Parliament?

Mr. Hague: It is no longer any good asking me about the policy of my party. I am now free to criticise anybody, abandon anything that I want to abandon and adopt the role of an embryo elder statesman.

One argument against regional government is the quality of some of the debate in the Welsh Assembly. We all accept that the referendum took place. There is an Assembly and it will remain, most of us accept that: but has there been a dramatic improvement in the quality of debate or government? I am not sure about that.

In the county of North Yorkshire, part of which I have the honour to represent, our problem is not a democratic deficit. We have local democratic institutions. We have our county and district councils. Why should we have more remote government? It already seems pretty remote. People in some of the dales in my constituency think that Northallerton is a long way away, let alone Leeds, Sheffield or Hull, which are somewhere down in the midlands as far as some of my constituents are concerned.

Mr. Dawson: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hague: I will not give way again, because under the new modernised time limits I should lose the time that I have gained from the earlier two interventions. It is surprising how rapidly we get wise to such things.

I implore Ministers to think again about local government and at least to allow counties that do not want to be part of a new regional structure a vote to express that. If we in North Yorkshire vote not to be part of a Yorkshire regional assembly, we should not have to be part of it. We do not need a regional assembly. We have a regional identity in Yorkshire, but it comes from our cricket team and our attitude and we shall keep both of them. We do not need an assembly.

An assembly would also damage the prospects of the rural economy because the rural economy would not get a look-in under most of the regional assemblies that are being predicted, worked on and prepared for in the proposed legislation. I want to make some brief points about the rural economy in the time that remains.

First, the difficulty of providing rural services should be fully taken into account in the new calculations of local government finance allocations. So far, that has not been done. The rural services partnership has made

[Mr. Hague]

some extremely good points. It is far more expensive to provide a small school in the Yorkshire dales, which may have only 20 pupils because it is miles and miles from anywhere, than to provide education in urban areas. That needs to be factored into the calculations for local government finance.

If the Government decide to move more resources away from the shire counties over the next few months, every time the Prime Minister stands at the Dispatch Box and talks about funding for this, that or the other, rural services will have been specifically and deliberately excluded and we shall point that out to people in rural areas.

Secondly, I implore Ministers to give renewed and even more urgent attention to flood prevention. That is the ultimate local issue, because it affects some people hugely but others not at all. I have seen the severe problems caused by flooding in Northallerton and Middleham in the Yorkshire dales. One of the few little bits of reorganisation that should be allowed, as a tidying-up measure, would be to clarify who was responsible for flood prevention. Currently, central Government, the district authorities and county authorities, the internal drainage board, English Nature and the Environment Agency all have a role. If that could be simplified, we could tackle flood prevention much more effectively in future.

Will Ministers give the necessary financial help? The budget was increased under the previous Government, and has been under the current one—I give them credit for that; it is needed for areas that have suffered badly from flooding during the past two years. Many of them, such as Northallerton, sadly, are in North Yorkshire.

The final thing that DEFRA Ministers must do for the rural economy is to ensure that the measures being taken to try to prevent the return of foot and mouth disease are effective and workable. The 20-day movement restriction on animals is neither. It is not merely that it is an expensive burden—it is not effective.

Last week I visited the auction mart at Hawes in Wensleydale, where I saw two sets of sheep standing next to each other, yet a farmer could take one set back to his farm but not the other. The restriction is not effective. I realise that it will be reviewed by February, but DEFRA needs to get on with that if there are to be effective domestic measures, in which people have confidence, to combat the spread of a future outbreak of foot and mouth disease.

That is what the Government should be doing for the rural economy, not implementing a hotch-potch of measures that will shut it out of consideration in large parts of our local government in future. We needed a different Queen's Speech, which is why I support the Opposition amendment.

6.9 pm

Joyce Quin (Gateshead, East and Washington, West): I very much welcome the opportunity to participate in this debate and, indeed, to follow the right hon. Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague). I do not agree with his thesis that rural areas will be excluded from regional considerations. Indeed, I believe that regional assemblies can provide a very good focus to show the links between rural and urban areas and to ensure that rural proofing becomes a reality, that rural concerns are fully integrated into regional approaches, and that farming, as well as rural industries generally, can benefit a great deal from the process.

The measures in the Queen's Speech, including those being debated today, will be good for my constituency and the north-east of England. I was rather amazed to hear the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow), who is no longer in his place, describe regions as being amorphous monstrosities. I can certainly tell him that the north-east is not an amorphous monstrosity; it is a region with a very distinct identity. I believe that it will be able to make great progress because of the measures contained in the Gracious Speech.

I very much welcome the measures on housing, including those on improving housing standards and dealing with some of the problems in the private rented sector, which are considerable in my constituency. Proposals, such as those on licensing landlords, have been made strongly and convincingly by my own council in Gateshead—a very good council, which stands in stark contrast to the description of Labour councils given by the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden (David Davis).

I am pleased that measures on antisocial behaviour will enable action to be taken against the menace of airguns and air weapons, which have been a scourge of my constituency, other parts of the region and, indeed, other parts of the country. I very much welcome the initiative that the Government are taking.

I also welcome the fact that the Government are addressing the financial needs of local authorities. We in the north-east of England have suffered from the double whammy of the way in which the standard spending assessment is calculated and the operation of the Barnett formula, both of which need to be fundamentally reformed. I am glad that the Government are certainly prepared to address the issue of council finance.

I made my maiden speech in the debate on the Queen's Speech after the 1987 general election. I said:

> "I should like to see measures of devolution introduced for all the regions of the United Kingdom that want it. In the north, that would mean a regional assembly as well as a development agency".—[*Official Report*, 30 June 1987; Vol. 118, c. 441.]

Hon. Members will therefore understand that I am very enthusiastic about the Government's commitment to go down precisely that route, albeit that it is overdue. I believe that, in many ways, the measures could be strengthened. None the less, we ought to pay tribute to their commitment and, indeed, to that of the Deputy Prime Minister, who has been a consistent advocate of regional government.

In the debate last week, my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Andrew Mackinlay) referred to regional government as being part of the good governance agenda, and I very strongly agree with that view. Devolution to the national territories—Scotland and Wales—was extremely important, but I have always felt that devolution should benefit all of us in the United Kingdom, irrespective of where we live. I am willing, however, to concede that there should be a large element of public choice in whatever structures are set up. For that reason, I very much welcome the fact that

referendums will be held only in those areas where a clear demand has been shown. None the less, I have always felt that the commitment to devolution in Scotland and Wales certainly required a framework to be established that allowed for similar reforms across the United Kingdom, and the Deputy Prime Minister has felt strongly about that for a very long time.

I was disappointed by some of the criticisms that have been voiced, particularly by those of the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden. He tried to make respectable the fact that he wishes to deny a choice to the people in the regions. It makes no sense to deny that choice to people in the regions, and it will be difficult to explain to them.

I do not believe that we are talking about an extra tier, which seems to be part of the wide criticism that has been made. We are talking about democratising an existing tier and giving its ownership to people in the regions. Ironically, that tier was set up to a large extent by the previous Conservative Administration. Surely, if the comments about giving people choice mean anything at all, giving people a sense of ownership of the institutions that already exist in their region makes a huge amount of sense.

Mr. McLoughlin: The right hon. Lady says that something that already exists is being democratised, but what already exists is unelected and not welcomed by most people in those areas.

Joyce Quin: I am interested in what the hon. Gentleman says. He seems to criticise not only what his own Government set up but any chance of anyone having a democratic involvement in and ownership of those institutions. I find his comments completely incomprehensible.

I also find it rather odd that the move towards regional government is sometimes considered as something newfangled. I think that it was a Liberal Prime Minister, Gladstone, who first spoke in favour regional devolution, as well as home rule for Ireland and the other measures that are so well known from that time. At home I have a book on regional devolution that was printed before the first world war, and I know from looking at party archives in my part of the world that there has been a great deal of interest in the issue for many years. So it is not newfangled, but I am glad that, at last, it is being properly addressed.

Obviously, the new devolved institutions are still establishing themselves, particularly in Scotland and Wales, but they have encouraged new people to become part of the political process. I very much welcome the greater participation of women, particularly in the Welsh Assembly, as well as in the Scottish Parliament.

Overall, I should like to express strong support for the Government's measures on regional devolution. I am convinced that this is an exciting and long-overdue opportunity for people in regions such as mine—the north-east—and I look forward with enthusiasm and determination to campaigning for a positive vote in the referendum.

6.17 pm

Mrs. Gillian Shephard (South-West Norfolk): It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for Gateshead, East and Washington, West (Joyce Quin). She and I were elected in the same year, since when she has been a consistent advocate of regional devolution. Although I have great respect for her, I will devote my remarks to trying to demolish her arguments, because we disagree on this issue.

The House may like to recall the claims for regional devolution made by the Minister for Local Government and the Regions in *The House Magazine*, dated 3 June this year. When writing about the White Paper, "Your Region, Your Choice", he said:

> "The White Paper is fundamentally about bringing decision-making closer to the people, and making government more efficient and accountable. Having completed the devolution of power to Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, and brought back democratic city-wide government to London, we are now extending opportunities for devolving power throughout England."

It should not be necessary in the House to make the point that the true tests of a democracy are its accountability and transparency. If constitutional change, devolutionary or otherwise, is to be introduced, it should be obvious that it must not be conducted piecemeal, since change to the constituent parts must inevitably affect the form and functions of the whole, sometimes unpredictably. At all times, the test of whether it enhances, and does not reduce, accountability and transparency should be applied.

Jim Knight: The right hon. Lady talks about accountability and transparency, but would she describe the Government offices for the regions, which the Tory Administration set up, as being accountable and transparent? Is not the very good reason for introducing regional government the fact that regional quangos and government offices can be made genuinely accountable to the people whom they serve?

Mrs. Shephard: The hon. Gentleman should not confuse administrative arrangements with quasi-political accountability. I hope that what I go on to say will convince him of the rightness of my argument.

Let us consider the Government's record with regard to these tests. It is not only my opinion that the Government introduced sweeping devolutionary change for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland with no thought for its effect on the parliamentary process, or on the constitution overall; it was the opinion of the Select Committee in its comments in July 1998. The Government followed a piecemeal approach to devolution, which, in the end, left a democratic deficit for England. In seeking—or so they say—to address that democratic deficit, they are again adopting a piecemeal approach whereby parts of the whole may opt for one structure, while others may prefer the status quo, which will be denied to them because of the decision of the others. As in national devolution, the effect of the decision of parts of the whole on the rest does not seem to concern the Government, but it should concern the House.

Let us consider whether the results of a similar process for London have passed the Minister's tests. Have the devolved arrangements for London governance, in his words, brought decision making "closer to the people" and made Government "more efficient and accountable" and—I would add—transparent? Londoners voted narrowly in favour of an executive

[Mrs. Shephard]

Mayor and a Greater London Authority. It is worth reminding the House that the Act to enable those elections to take place, and other changes to be made, gave no fewer than 277 additional powers to the Secretary of State. So much for decentralisation of power. Let us allow that to pass, however, as worse is to come.

What about transparency and accountability? Londoners are now asked to vote for borough councillors, two kinds of Assembly members, the Mayor of London, Westminster Members of Parliament, and Members of the European Parliament. They must also master the functions and responsibilities of the Government office for London, the London regional development agency, the London police authority, the fire and emergency planning commission and so on. Do those individuals, bodies and structures help Londoners when they want to report, and get something done about, a hole in the road? The answer is no. That answers the hon. Gentleman's question.

Do Londoners think that London is run better as a result of having an assembly? Ask any cab driver—or anyone else—and close your ears to the language that follows. People see the increase in traffic jams, the snarl-ups on the tube, and the inexplicable street closures. What they do not see is who is to blame, as it is not clear. Not only have the twin tests of transparency and accountability not been enhanced by devolution, but because of the proliferation of politicians, bodies and quangos that have appeared in its wake, they have been further obscured.

David Burnside (South Antrim): On the small point of the normal opinion poll of London cab drivers, does she agree that London cab drivers are very much in favour of the current Administration in London because of the disgraceful hike in fares after a certain time of night, which was imposed on London by the current Mayor?

Mrs. Shephard: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman only travels late at night. It is true, of course, that that does bias cab drivers in the Government's favour. When daylight comes, however, and they see the snarl-ups and jams again, their opinion changes. The Government want to extend the principle to the rest of England, and that does not bode well.

Mr. Brian H. Donohoe (Cunninghame, South): I am listening carefully to the right hon. Lady. Surely the basic question is whether she accepts or rejects democracy. It is for the people to determine whether they want regional government in a referendum. Surely she must accept democracy.

Mrs. Shephard: My test for whether democracy is effective is whether it is transparent and accountable. I am saying to the House, and directly to the Minister, that this pattern obscures accountability and transparency, and therefore obscures democracy, too.

The Minister claimed in *The House* magazine of 3 June 2002 that the White Paper is relevant to all the English regions, because, regardless of whether people opt for regional assemblies, it proposes in any case to enhance the role of regional chambers, devolve more powers to Government offices and give regions more say in the policy-making process. He calls that "extending opportunities". How have the precursors of those "opportunities" worked out so far? In the first instance, to give one early example, the East Midlands Development Agency included no representative at all from Lincolnshire, the only truly rural and largest county in the region. That did not bring the decision-making process very close to the people of Lincolnshire.

Dr. Whitehead *rose—*

Mrs. Shephard: In my region of East Anglia, it was only with the utmost difficulty that we managed to explain to the powers that be in the East of England Development Agency that the sugar beet industry accounted for some 10,000 jobs in Norfolk alone, and that any threat to its future as an important local product would have economic repercussions. The appointed EEDA chairman caused despair at an NFU meeting earlier this year when he explained that the agency's principal contribution to the prosperity of what he called "the sector" had been to make substantial grants for the marketing of pickled herring. The relevance of that claim to the situation of Norfolk farmers who have seen an income drop of 50 per cent. in the current year alone escaped all present.

More recently still, this summer, an important local vegetable processor was threatened with closure and the loss of thousands of jobs, with the attendant effects on producers, packagers, labellers and hauliers. Thanks to the vigorous efforts of my hon. Friend the Member for North-West Norfolk (Mr. Bellingham), the hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb), who is in his place, and with a little help from me, the situation was saved. Some days after the problem had been solved, we all received a letter from the East of England Development Agency, to tell us that they were on to the case. Small wonder that the agency's mere existence, where it is known, elicits a combination of disbelief and exasperation.

Locally, therefore, the development agency—where anything is known about its work—has not covered itself with glory. Perhaps it has been given an impossible task, however. What, after all, does rural Norfolk have in common with parts of suburban Hertfordshire, and how does the Essex coast identify with Luton? Indeed, by seeking to overlay the eight administrative regions of England with a political identity, the Government are making a basic error. I do not know a lot about the south-west, but I wonder whether the people of Cornwall would welcome losing their identity and being ruled from Bristol. I know of few common causes between the Isles of Scilly and Tewkesbury. What common identity could one claim for the huge and disparate south-east, which ranges from Milton Keynes to the Isle of Wight? It is simply not possible.

There are other deeper issues, however, concerning the electorate's sense of identity. The Government partly justified the establishment of a Scottish Parliament and a Welsh Assembly by praying in aid the importance of sense of identity in Scotland and Wales, but they are now, apparently, trying to use the same arguments to submerge that same sense of identity in English counties. If the Government were logical in their

concerns for devolution, surely they should give the Cornish Celts their own Parliament, like the Scottish Celts and the Welsh Celts.

If someone from a rural area is asked where they are from, how do they reply? Do they say that they are from the south-west or from Devon? Do they say that they are from the north-east or from Northumberland? County identity is strong, it represents people's sense of place and tradition, and it should also have an administrative and governance role that is not purely ornamental.

Mr. Dawson: Will the right hon. Lady give way?

Mrs. Shephard: No, I will not give way any more.

My next set of arguments concern the effects of piecemeal reform, which we have already seen in national devolution. It has simply not worked, and it has made more problems than it has attempted to solve. In proposing these changes, the Government will find themselves, in the end, with completely different kinds of local government across the country. Their wish to devolve power from the centre will result in confusion, heavy costs, administrative change for the sake of it, and, worst of all, obscured accountability and transparency—a denial of what democracy should be about.

6.29 pm

Dr. Alan Whitehead (Southampton, Test): I particularly wish to welcome the measures in the Queen's Speech that are designed to enhance the process of democratic accountability in this country and to devolve power to its appropriate level. My hon. Friends have already mentioned them, but I am particularly pleased to see in the Queen's Speech a Bill to prepare for regional assemblies and a local government Bill designed to give local authorities more freedoms and more flexibility.

This is not a mere academic issue. The centralisation of power in Great Britain has long been a wonder of the world. Yet a mature democracy needs to have its mode of governance at all levels working well, being held to account for the action of government at each level, and engaging the public in the process of accountability. That has spin-offs. Active healthy communities lead to better civil engagement, that leads to better government, and that leads to healthy communities. It is a real issue with real benefits. The Regional Assemblies (Preparations) Bill will bring that accountability to a tier of government that has long been the preserve of the quango and the ill-defined regional body. It will allow regions to speak up for themselves, and to engage in their own economic development and in the planning of how the regions work.

The local government Bill will give local authorities greater freedoms to trade and use their own resources as they feel is most appropriate for their local circumstances. It will sweep away the machinery of central second-guessing about many things, such as the shape and the nature of a local authority's capital programme.

Mr. Robert Syms (Poole): Many of my constituents in Poole work in Southampton, and they tend to look east towards Winchester and Hampshire. However, we are in the south-west region, although many of us think that we should not be part of that. Does the hon. Gentleman have any sympathy for those of us who think that we are in the wrong region?

Dr. Whitehead: Perhaps we can discuss the issue on another occasion, but I have some sympathy for that view.

Andrew George (St. Ives): The hon. Gentleman's knowledge of this subject is much respected. We know that he is one of the architects behind the Government's White Paper. However, as he has already demonstrated sympathy for the view expressed by the hon. Member for Poole (Mr. Syms), is he prepared to comment more generally on the settlement of the boundaries of regional assemblies? Does he believe that regional assemblies with their present boundaries are deliverable in the south-west?

Dr. Whitehead: In the fulness of time, we could engage in a debate on how the boundaries in the south-west and the south-east might be formulated if and when a referendum takes place in those areas. That is my personal belief, but my personal belief only.

The proposals will lead to real advances for local freedoms and for accountability. In the process, they redefine the relationship between the centre and the local. However, it is important that they are seen as milestones along the way, not as the end of the road.

Regional assemblies have the potential to incorporate and place within the sphere of democratic accountability a range of regional bodies that administer substantial funds on behalf of the population, affecting the lives of people in those regions to a considerable degree. However, those bodies do not possess a shred of accountability through the democratic process for what they do. Contrary to what those on the Opposition Front Bench suggest, we are not talking in the main about new funds, but about the transfer of funds from the sphere of non-accountability to the sphere of accountability in the regional assemblies.

I hope that the emergence of the regional assemblies across England will be followed by their establishment as a true repository of democratic accountability for regional decisions. The Bill paves the way for such choices to be made. Once that process is under way, a second Bill, setting out the powers and detailed arrangements for each assembly, will be necessary. I hope that the process of incorporating regional decisions into a framework of accountability is evident at that stage—sooner rather than later. I also hope that the powers acquired by those regions will be drawn down from the centre and not sucked up from the local level. We have that statement of intent in the White Paper on the regions, and my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister reiterated it today. I am sure that the intention will become a reality.

The Opposition have made much of the alleged "sucking-up" of powers that they consider will take place if counties, even after a popular referendum has been held, are in any way changed in function or even abolished as a result of the changes. I have to confess to smiling to myself when I see shire counties suddenly

[Dr. Whitehead]

reinvented as micro-level community champions, by councillors who previously did not have much time for that concept. I could understand it if the defence of counties as quasi-regional planning authorities were mounted, but that argument is, I guess, less cute and appealing. Therefore, we suddenly have counties as communities. What meretricious nonsense. A proper division between which level of government plans and which level of government provides local services would unerringly settle on districts and towns for the latter, and regions, and perhaps some counties, for the former.

I am also wryly amused by the Opposition's sudden conversion to localism. As someone who spent many years trying to make a local council function for its communities in the face of unrelenting central diktats from the then Government, I hope that I will be forgiven my wry smile. What a localism we now see. According to the Opposition, local authorities should be able to decide whether to have any, some or no new housing in their area, and everyone else can go hang. The centre will hand the money out and shut up, and there will be a string of right-wing local soviets across the country.

It is vital that we understand the proper relationship between the centre and the local. It must be one of spheres of, for example, national or regional responsibility for some framework decisions, and full trust in local government for other decisions. It must be a framework, not the mess suggested by the Opposition's plans—and the two Bills will add up to such a framework.

There is a further consequence. Sooner or later, the centre will need to look at itself as the changes kick in. Let us look at the centre from the other end of the telescope, for example. Responsibility for local government and the presence of the state at local level is dissipated among a number of ministries, one of which—the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister—has some influence, but by no means a decisive influence. Education is in the hands of the Department for Education and Skills, which also oversees the unelected bodies providing for training and lifelong learning through the local learning and skills councils. Yet the local leader of the council will speak on education, along with his or her chair of education.

Social services matters will also rank highly in the letters that the leader of a council receives. To obtain redress for the concerns raised in those letters, he or she must write not to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister but to the Department of Health. There is also the often vexed question of who collects the rubbish and what is done with it. Surely that is a very local issue, so is it not one that the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister should discuss with the local authorities? No. This time the route of dialogue is with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. Of course, the rubbish bins in a block of flats might have been set alight by local hooligans, who might need a form of community remedy to require them to desist from such activity, and to occupy their time more positively. Is that a matter for the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister? No. This time it is a matter for the Home Office.

Local roads may need new signs to help the community to get about, and this time, it is a matter for the Department of Transport. Local people may be concerned by the way in which local elections work and how they might help community involvement and communication. The obvious port of call in such cases is the Lord Chancellor's Department. However, in the recently published consultation paper on the way in which local government should be funded—and, if the enabling and supporting role is to be made real, how communities will be supported—the appearance is that everything is the responsibility of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. However, in reality, such a document has to be negotiated between four or five Departments—even if the Treasury's keen interest in the overall shape of the outcome is to be discounted for the moment. "Negotiated" might be a kind word to use, because the position of those Departments vis-à-vis local services and communities can amount almost to a veto.

This state of affairs illustrates, as other ways of describing the situation could not, that there is an urgent need for the centre eventually to address its relationship with the local if we are to make anything like a reality of the new form of the centre-local relationships. Such a fractured system not only serves to dissipate and confuse the efforts of local communities and their elected representatives to work locally in a consistent manner, but seriously compromises the idea of anyone being seen to be accountable for what happens locally, and of communities being provided with straight answers when questions are asked. Now, it simply seems that the Department nominally responsible for local government is actually responsible for it.

The Bill will help us down the road to recovery in the tortuous relationship between the centre and the local, and will go a long way towards building trust and confidence in that relationship. However, in the words of my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister, there is a lot done, and a lot more to do.

6.39 pm

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): I wish to speak about the rural economy, and in particular about the developing jobs crisis in the oil and fishing industries in Scotland. I am delighted that the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, who is the Minister responsible for fishing, has returned to listen to my remarks from the biodiversity conference in Rio, where he has been toiling on our behalf, and at our expense.

The indifference that the Queen's Speech shows to the major issues that I wish to raise reflects the indifference of the Prime Minister to the serious jobs crisis developing in Scotland. Tens of thousands of livelihoods are now at stake.

First, however, I want to deal with the incredible speech by the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden (David Davis). For the benefit of those fortunate enough not to have listened to it, let me set out what he said. He argued that London and Scotland have high unemployment and low growth because they have an Assembly and a Parliament respectively. The same logic applies to saying, "The cat sat on the mat, and as that animal sits on the mat, that animal must be a cat." It is, of course, total and utter nonsense.

The London Assembly and the Scottish Parliament have been in existence for three years. No economist in the world—whether Austrian school, Keynesian, left-

wing, right-wing or somewhere in the middle—would attribute an impact on economic growth over three years to anything other than one of three things: fiscal policy, interest rate policy or exchange rate policy. Over a generation—or 10 years, perhaps—education, the labour market or the micro-economy might have an influence, but over three years, the factors would have to be interest rate policy, exchange rate policy or fiscal policy. Where are those three things controlled? Here. They are not controlled in the London Assembly, the Scots Parliament or the Welsh Assembly.

When the leader of the Conservative party was elected, I thought that the Conservatives had gone a long way towards reaching the bottom, certainly as far their ability to communicate was concerned. I now see that they had a lucky escape. Indeed, although the former leader of the Conservative party described himself as an elder statesman, on the evidence of other speeches, he should be the coming man—the young hopeful. He told me a few minutes ago that he was coming back; for a second I thought he meant to the Front Bench, but he meant to his seat at the back. The Conservative party is not going in the right direction if the speech by the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden is anything to go by.

As for the developing crisis in the rural economy in Scotland, the crisis in oil jobs was manufactured in Downing street. I do not know whether No. 10 or No. 11 was responsible, but the oil industry in Scotland was looking forward to a substantial period of prosperity at the start of the year, until the tax change in the Budget. Even if we did not expect a boom, we went from expecting a period of sustained expansion to the drilling of a mere 12—one dozen—exploration wells in the North sea this year. That is the lowest total on record—less than half of last year's total, which itself was not a great year. The fundamental reason for that is the change in attitude and confidence as a result of misguided tax changes in the Budget.

I did not mind the Government trying to reap some of the enormous assets that the harvesters of the North sea were themselves reaping. But if that is the strategy and the policy, there has to be a way to reward the new investors that we want to take over the assets and make the investments that the bigger established companies are not keen to make. I do not take sides with BP or Lord Browne when he argues about the Government's lack of consultation. Lord Browne's company does not consult local communities when it takes dire decisions that affect them, such as those made in my community recently and in the communities of other hon. Members.

I want a coherent strategy for keeping the North sea show on the road and maintaining the tens of thousands of jobs that depend on it. If it can be argued that it is necessary to tax companies such as BP and Shell, which have grown rich on the back of North sea resources, it can also be argued that it is necessary to give the new incoming companies an opportunity to take over investments, and make the investments required to ensure the future of the North sea oil industry.

Let me mention two or three ways of doing that. The North sea acreage is held by a few companies. Unless that acreage is relinquished to companies that are prepared to invest, nothing substantial will be achieved. Companies must use it or lose it. We must make it possible for people to invest in fields that other companies want to abandon. I spoke to the company that has taken over the Argyll field, which was abandoned. It has invested in that field, which has a new lifecycle and a new name. The company told me that that was the 12th proposition it had made to a major company before any company would accept the idea. It should be part of the procedure for any company that wants to abandon a field to offer it to the marketplace three years beforehand, to see whether anyone wants to take it over.

There should be an insurance system against abandonment. The new smaller companies cannot carry the same insurance liabilities as the older companies, which are not investing. The money that we give back to companies as a royalty rebate should be attached to future investment plans. Otherwise, the Government will end up giving back money to companies that will promptly spend it in west Africa or the Gulf.

In addition, we need to get rid of the ridiculous situation that allows some North sea infrastructure assets and pipelines to be taxed at more than 70 per cent. Some are taxed at 40 per cent., and if a company takes gas to Zeebrugge in Belgium and then transports it over the interconnector, it will be taxed another 30 per cent. That is ridiculous. We need a coherent strategy, because thousands of jobs are at stake.

Her Majesty's Government have been the biggest harvester of all in the North sea. They have reaped £150 billion, which is £30,000 for every man, woman and child in Scotland. Those on the Conservative Front Bench should remember that next time they whine about Scottish public spending levels.

A crisis is enveloping my constituency and those of many other hon. Members around the coastline of Scotland. The town of Fraserburgh has a 55 per cent. employment dependency on fishing. That means not just the people who catch or process fish. It covers all the jobs in the harbours, including electricians, plumbers, joiners, and those who work in ice factories. In Annan, the dependency is more than 30 per cent. In Oban, Kirkcudbright, Banff, Newton Stewart, Skye, Ullapool, the Western isles, Campbeltown, Argyll, Keith, Buckie, Berwickshire, the Shetland isles and Peterhead, which is also in my constituency, there is a dependency of 10 per cent. or much more. All those communities around Scotland face utter devastation in a crisis that, if it was not manufactured by the European Commission, is being made a great deal worse by it.

It is extraordinary that any reputable group of scientists should propose that it is all right to take a million tonnes of sand eels out of the North sea, including a 50,000 tonne by-catch of quality fish, by fishing with a tiny mesh, while simultaneously proposing that there should be no fishing for human consumption in the same waters. I am sure the Minister will understand that, because he has often stood at the Dispatch Box to argue against industrial fishing in the North sea. The proposition is incredible. I want the Prime Minister to give priority to the fishing issue. If President Chirac faced the same crisis in the French fishing industry, he would bang the phones, making sure he mobilised European concerns.

David Burnside: Will the hon. Gentleman break the habit of a lifetime? When he refers to the Scottish

[David Burnside]

industry in the North sea, will he add the west of Scotland fishing industry and the Northern Ireland fishing industry in the Irish sea?

Mr. Salmond: I welcome the hon. Gentleman's intervention. I appreciate his concern for the industry in Northern Ireland and around the coastline elsewhere.

We need the Prime Minister to give priority to the issue. He will bang the phones for George W. Bush to deal with an international crisis. We want him to do the same thing for the fishing industry in Scotland, Northern Ireland and around the coastline. He should make it a priority, so that we no longer face the indifference of the highest office in the land.

6.48 pm

Mr. Eric Martlew (Carlisle): The Queen's Speech is excellent. Having said that, there are some flaws in it, and I shall concentrate on three or four of the 19 Bills and three draft Bills announced in it.

The Communications Bill is necessary. There is no doubt about that, because technology has moved on. Digital television and satellite mean that we need to change our practices, which is fine, although I am worried at the prospect of Channel 5 being purchased by, for example, Rupert Murdoch. That in itself might not seem a problem, but I am concerned about the future of ITV. Some people may say that that reflects normal competition, but I am sure that hon. Members need no reminding of the fact that ITV has to provide regional broadcasting. Channel 4 and Channel 5 do not have to do that. There is no doubt that a system in which a successful Channel 5 took revenue from ITV might cause the collapse of regional broadcasting.

The area that I represent is covered by Border Television. We have very good regional television, so I hope that, when we come to the details of the Communications Bill, we will accept the need for some safeguarding of regional television. We should either say that international companies cannot buy Channel 5, for example, or require by mandate that those companies provide regional broadcasting. I hope that that point is not lost on the Minister.

The Community Care (Delayed Discharges etc.) Bill is excellent and long overdue. I have been banging my head against a brick wall with regard to Cumbria county council for a while. I am not saying that just because a Conservative-Liberal alliance runs it, because similar problems have arisen in the past. Last week, at my local hospital, the Cumberland infirmary, there were 34 delayed discharges, the vast majority of them due to the fact that social services were not providing the resources to get people out of hospital and into nursing care or back home. That same hospital is cancelling operations because of a shortage of beds. I am sure that throughout the country social services look on someone staying in hospital for an extra fortnight as £400 a week saved. The expense goes on the NHS bill, not the social services bill. There is very little regard for the individuals who are imprisoned in hospital, but the practice saves money.

Last year, the Government made a lot more extra money available to local authorities to help to get people out of hospital, and that worked for a while. If the searchlight is turned on social services departments, they will respond, but as soon as that searchlight is moved, we are back to the bad old days. Given that nursing home owners in my constituency are telling me that they have vacancies and are in danger of going bankrupt while some of my constituents are imprisoned in hospital and others are having their operations cancelled because of the shortage of beds, something has to be done. The Government are completely right about that, and the sooner the Bill is introduced the better. I accept that more intermediate care beds might have to be provided; I do not think that that is an issue.

I see no advantage to my constituents in the proposal for foundation hospitals. Our problem in what we call north Cumbria is that, of necessity, we have two different district general hospitals. They are 40 miles apart; one is in the Copeland constituency and one is in mine. There are not adequate resources for both hospitals. We need extra money because we need those two hospitals. Foundation hospitals will do nothing for my constituents, and I will find it very difficult going through the Lobby to vote with the Government on that.

I come to the Regional Assemblies (Preparations) Bill. I am in favour of regional assemblies; they are long overdue. I disagree with the Government about which region north Cumbria should be in. I strongly believe that we belong with the northern region. There is no argument about that; I am quite sure that that is the case. None the less, we hear comments such as, "There's no point in debating this because the Deputy Prime Minister has said that we are in the north-west." The boundary commission is to look at local government reorganisation. Why does it not take into account the views of people in the area? Then, if it is decided that we fall into the north-west region, fine. If that route is not taken, we will still have some disagreement.

I worry about the fact that we will have to reorganise local government if regional assemblies are established. I say as a former chairman of Cumbria county council that we have been crying out for local government reorganisation regardless of regional assemblies. The two-tier system is not working any more. Representatives of senior businesses in my constituency are angry about the red tape. They tell me, "The county council does this, but the district council does that." We need reorganisation of local government regardless of regional government, and we need a unitary authority.

It is nonsense for the Government to tell people, "Vote in a referendum for regional government and we'll get rid of your county council." My hon. Friend the Member for City of Durham (Mr. Steinberg) is present. The argument in Durham is about whether to preserve the county council, not about whether to have regional government. I hope that the Government will reconsider and decide that local government should be reorganised to form a single tier.

Mr. Dawson: I agree with a great deal of what my hon. Friend is saying, but is not the argument about regional government an argument about quality? Would not north-west regional government be more palatable to

the people of Carlisle if they felt that their region would be able to engage the whole of the north-west rather than being dominated by areas to the south?

Mr. Martlew: My hon. Friend is wrong. I have nothing against the north-west region; my family originate from there. It just so happens, however, that the people from north Cumbria have always gone down the Tyne valley and never over Shap. Historically, that is where we should be.

I am delighted that we are to have a Bill on hunting. As long as we can amend the Bill, I see no objection to it. I know that it will be argued in my area that fell paths should be retained, but in those areas they breed foxes to hunt, so it is not a matter of pest control.

Mr. Gerry Steinberg (City of Durham): Is my hon. Friend not a little disappointed, as I am, that the Government have not had the guts to put to the House the abolition of hunting with hounds, rather than the proposed gimmick of licensing or whatever?

Mr. Martlew: I understand my hon. Friend's frustration, but we should not prejudge the Government. They have not come forward with a Bill at all yet. Perhaps they will surprise us—although perhaps not.

The antisocial behaviour Bill will also be greeted with tremendous enthusiasm in my constituency. We must consider air weapons and fireworks, as both create considerable problems throughout the country. Recently, four swans were killed on the River Eden by somebody with an air weapon. The firework season now starts in September and goes well into January. Air weapons and fireworks have become far more powerful than they were when I was young. If we do not get legislation right this time and stop the antisocial behaviour of some, we will have to put the banning of fireworks and air weapons in the next Queen's Speech.

Angus Robertson (Moray): The hon. Gentleman mentioned the risk of abuse of fireworks and air weapons. Does he concede that the Government should look into the sale of BB guns, as a large number of injuries have been reported recently in my constituency resulting from the misuse of such so-called toys, which are sold to very young children?

Mr. Martlew: New technology has taken over from the old spud gun that I remember well.

The antisocial behaviour Bill will be excellent. My concern is that the police might not implement the law. In October, I wrote to my local police force pointing out that it is of course illegal to throw fireworks in the street. It is illegal to let them off in a public place. I accept the police's argument that the law is difficult to implement, but I want a clear law—if people misuse fireworks they should be brought to court or, even better perhaps, subject to a fixed fine. Without doubt, my elderly constituents are worried. I recently received a letter from a lady with a guide dog. She was concerned that she could not leave the house because the guide dog was terrified. I received—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): Order. The hon. Gentleman's time is up, I am afraid. I call the hon. Member for South-West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous).

7 pm

Andrew Selous (South-West Bedfordshire): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. It is a great privilege to speak in this debate on the Queen's Speech, particularly given the quality of the contributions.

Like the hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody), I very much welcome the transport safety Bill. I commute into London from my constituency in common with many of my constituents, who travel from Leighton Buzzard station or elsewhere and will certainly welcome the Bill. Part 2 of the Bill may cover certain aspects of transport safety, but I am anxious that there is no mention at all of safety measures covering car drivers using mobile phones. I was a signatory to early-day motion 1108, which was signed by 128 Members. Our early-day motion stated that 17 deaths have been caused by drivers using mobile phones. The Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents says that using a mobile phone while driving is at least as dangerous as being over the limit. I therefore hope that the Government will consider including that in part 2.

The Minister for Transport (Mr. John Spellar): May I ease the hon. Gentleman's concerns? The consultation document out at the moment points out that primary legislation is not required, as secondary legislation could cater for the problem if the consultation points to the need for action.

Andrew Selous: I am grateful to the Minister. I am sure that many hon. Members will look to the Government to make sure that that happens.

It is the Opposition's function to point out urgent problems that have not been addressed in the Queen's Speech. The Government tell us that they are pro-business, but many businesses in my constituency have been badly affected or put out of business completely by the actions of the local highways authority and the Highways Agency. There have been roadworks in North street in Leighton Buzzard and in the High street in Houghton Regis. They are currently creating a severe problem in the High street in Dunstable. So far, two businesses have been bankrupted following works by the Highways Agency and, only weeks before Christmas, members of staff, many with children, have been laid off. Other affected businesses say that their weekly takings are down by £1,800 £3,300 and £4,500 respectively. The Highways Agency told us that the roadworks would take 14 weeks, but so far they have taken 23 weeks and will extend into the Christmas period.

Like other hon. Members with similar problems in their constituencies, I am concerned that the highways authority and the Highways Agency are not liable for the loss of business in the locality. There is an inconsistency: under the Water Act 1989, compensation can be paid; under the Gas Act 1986, in which a time limit is specified for roadworks, compensation can be paid; and the same is true of the Land Compensation Act 1973. At the very least, we need an assessment of the impact on businesses of roadworks that can put traders out of business. In my constituency, for example, pubs have not been able to get deliveries of beer. Penalty clauses apply to contractors and only benefit the

[Andrew Selous]

Highways Agency—they should also benefit affected traders. There is a good case for a reduction in business rates where an independent audit clearly shows that businesses are thousands of pounds a week down. I am sure that many hon. Members will have come across similar problems created by major roadworks in their constituencies.

I want an end to the linkage of funds for urgent non-controversial works such as road repairs and basic environmental improvements to the local area's acceptance of other transport spending which is unwelcome, unwanted or extremely controversial. That undermines local democracy—councillors may have stood for election opposing certain schemes only to be told that their area could be denied millions of pounds for desperately needed road improvements unless they accept that funding. In my constituency, for example, the Translink scheme, a light busway between Luton and Dunstable, is bitterly opposed by many people and Dunstable town council. However, we were told that if we did not vote for it locally my constituency would be denied a lot of money.

We have been told that unless we accept the "green wave" works on the A5 through Dunstable, which are putting many traders in my constituency out of business, the much needed bypass to the north of Dunstable and Houghton Regis could be endangered by the Government. That shows no respect for local people—there are no grounds for that linkage of funds, and each case should be judged on its own merits.

As for planning, the removal of county structure plans will create a serious democrat deficit in regions that do not vote for regional assemblies. I listened carefully to the answer that the Deputy Prime Minister gave one of my colleagues, but I was not enlightened. The eastern region, of which my constituency is part, is the least likely in the United Kingdom to vote for a regional assembly. If the county structure plan, for which there is at least accountability through county councillors, is taken away, the regional development agency or some other body in Cambridge will assess our needs through regional spatial strategies—my constituents will not regard that at all favourably. I should be grateful for an assurance that the people of my region will not be blackmailed and told that they will be denied funds unless they vote for a regional assembly, as that would be extremely underhand.

A major review of airport capacity is taking place throughout the country. It is extremely important to acknowledge the quality of life of people who live close to airports. My constituency is much affected by aircraft traffic from Luton airport—it is the dominant issue for people in Studham, Whipsnade and Kensworth. Luton airport currently deals with 6 million passengers a year but under the proposals, that figure could be increased to 31 million—a huge expansion. I have severe doubts that our transport could cope with that, as the area is already extremely congested. The M1 is regularly blocked and the promised rail improvements have not materialised, so there are great concerns. There are also specific concerns about Luton, as it is not a designated airport, so is subject to lighter regulation, especially of night flights.

The local airport consultative committees are completely unable to influence anything that airports do. That is an affront to local people. The committee is the one body through which they can take the airport to task, yet it is not listened to. We need to give airport consultative committees considerably more teeth to do the job that local people want them to do. We need independent, unannounced audits of the environmental impact of airports if the monitoring of airport noise and nuisance is to be credible. European directive 2002/30 dealing with airport noise seems to continue the distinction between designated and non-designated airports, which is a great concern to people who live in the area around non-designated airports.

7.10 pm

Mr. Clive Betts (Sheffield, Attercliffe): I welcome most of the measures in the Queen's Speech. I begin by drawing attention to the antisocial behaviour provisions. Earlier this year, I called on the House to toughen the legislation in that respect. It is one of the most difficult problems with which hon. Members have to deal in their constituencies, and the extra powers that the police and local authorities are to be given should be warmly welcomed.

I echo the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew) about the problem of fireworks as one aspect of antisocial behaviour. I have had more letters on that subject this year than ever before. It seems to be becoming a much bigger issue. A total ban on the sale of fireworks to the general public would cause difficulties—there is always the danger of creating a black market—but we must legislate to restrict the sale of fireworks to certain times of the year, probably to allow only designated retailers to sell them, and to stop the sale of the largest and loudest fireworks. We should also roll out the pilot scheme currently under way in four police authorities, with on-the-spot fines for the improper use of fireworks in public places.

I shall spend the rest of the short time available to me considering the proposals for local government, planning and housing. We should not overestimate the total effect of the proposed local government Bill. I welcome many aspects of it, but the idea that it will completely change the balance between central and local government is an overestimate, which does not do it credit. There are some worthwhile measures in the Bill. It is a series of small steps in the right direction.

I welcome the introduction of prudential guidelines for local authority borrowing. I and others in local government, as I used to be before I came to this place, argued for that 20 years ago. I never thought that any Government would have the courage to do that, and I am pleased that it is a Labour Government who are doing it.

I welcome the proposals to free up local authorities' ability to trade. Of course, they should not be subsidised in that trading to do down firms in the private sector, but when a local authority goes in to install central heating in five local authority homes in a block of flats, the fact that it cannot also put central heating in for an owner-occupier there who may want that service, because that would count as trading, has always been nonsense. The measure in the Bill will allow such a problem to be sorted out. I welcome the changes to council tax benefits, as a response to the "daylight robbery" campaign. They are good and positive proposals, as well.

I welcome the review of the overall balance of funding between what local authorities can raise for themselves and what they get from central Government. That is the key issue. We will not have true local democracy and proper local government freedom until we alter that balance substantially. The fact that local authorities can raise only 25 per cent. of what they spend from local sources is a real constraint on that freedom, and the problems of gearing are well documented and well known.

I must say to my right hon. and hon. Friends on the Front Bench that the fact that the Government have ruled out the transfer of the business rate back to local authorities puts them in a very difficult position. I am not sure what other big idea is around to significantly shift that 25 per cent. of funding controlled by local authorities up towards 50 per cent. or more. Without the transfer of the business rate, I do not know how that will be achieved, but I look forward to the outcome of the review.

During this Parliament, we will see a change to the way in which the resources that come from central Government to local government are distributed. I shall make one brief comment on that. Some of us feel that the area cost adjustment has been extremely unfair and has discriminated against our local authorities for many years. I say to the Government that we are not against the principle, and recognise that in some parts of the country local authorities must pay more for staff because of local market conditions. I am quite prepared for an element of grant to be paid to authorities in the south-east to reflect the fact that they have to pay more for certain public sector workers. That is fair enough.

What I do not accept, and what I have not heard a justification for, is the idea that that area cost adjustment should reflect pay levels in the private sector, which have nothing at all to do with local authority responsibilities or costs. The fact that chief executives in London are paid a lot more than chief executives in Sheffield—I am speaking of the private sector—is no reason for London authorities to get extra grant to reflect that, because it is not a real cost for them.

David Taylor: Does my hon. Friend accept that although there is a justification for an increased level of grant within certain parameters for the south-east, to reward the people of Hertfordshire with a standard spending assessment that gives them 13 or 14 per cent. more per school pupil than the people of Leicestershire, which is right at the bottom of the county league table, is probably excessive?

Mr. Betts: I well understand those problems, and we can draw similar comparisons between northern authorities. Clearly, there are particular elements of any change that I would want to examine closely, such as the area cost adjustment. Overall, a comparison must be made between the amount of grant that children in neighbouring and similar authorities get from central Government for their education. That must be seen to be fair and reasonable in order to convince the public, who do not understand the arcane intricacies of the grant system, that they are getting a fair deal in their own local authority.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): I strongly agree with the hon. Gentleman's analysis. Does he accept that about 85 per cent. of the budget of the average school goes in teachers pay, that teachers pay is set nationally, and that outside London, that pay is likely to be equivalent, whether we are talking about the south-east, his area or mine in Cornwall?

Mr. Betts: I understand that issue very well. I come back to the point that any grant to reflect the extra amounts that particular authorities have to pay should be based on the realities of the situation, not on some general and philosophical formula that does not relate to the real costs that local authorities face.

On the planning proposals, I welcome many aspects of the planning Green Paper and the Government's response to the Select Committee's investigation. We need more resources to speed up the planning process. The fact that local authorities are dealing with the same number of applications as they were five or 10 years ago with fewer staff is a credit to them. They need more resources, and the Government will provide them. As well as quicker planning decisions, we need better planning decisions. I therefore welcome the proposals to improve pre-application consultation and to issue proper guidelines for consultation. The days when notices were stuck 30 ft up a telegraph pole should be at an end.

I welcome the proposal that the length of time for which a planning permission is valid should be cut from five years to three years, in general. I also agree that planning consents should not automatically be renewed, so that when planning guidance is changed, extant planning permissions do not undermine its effect for years to come.

My one worry is still the local development framework, and whether it will really be clearer and simpler to understand and allow quicker decisions than the unitary development plan system. The development plan system has been implemented far too slowly. Government could have insisted that it be speeded up. My worry is that if we replace a plan—a physical document indicating what development will be allowed on what sites in a particular area—with numerous written criteria and with some plans for development areas, some for conservation areas, some for greenbelt areas and some for proposed housing schemes, and that lot must be put together, I am not sure that the lack of an overall, written, laid down plan which the public and developers can see will lead to any greater certainty. In fact, it might lead to more confusion.

I know that the Government have said that under the new local development framework arrangements, authorities will be able to draw up a whole plan for their area, but they will not be compelled to do so. The certainty of having a plan is better for developers and for communities, who can see what sites in their area might be used for in the future. I am sure that we will return to the matter when we discuss the proposal in more detail.

Finally, on housing, I welcome the proposals for the draft Bills. For years, some of us have argued strongly for an end to the squalor and appalling conditions of many people living in houses in multiple occupation. It is right that we should have a proper system of control. I look forward to those proposals, and also to the

[Mr. Betts]

proposals to license landlords in the private sector in areas of housing need, where there are real housing problems.

Let me raise a matter mentioned by the Deputy Prime Minister. I welcome the Government's commitment to decent homes standards in council housing, but they must find resources to ensure that those standards are met irrespective of whether tenants vote for stock transfer. Tenants in Sheffield are bitterly opposed to it, and the proposed scheme did not meet the Government's requirements and did not add up financially anyway; but we must find resources enabling tenants who want their homes to remain in council ownership to have the same rights as those who vote for stock transfer. That is very important to my constituents.

I look forward to the hunting Bill, although I am sorry to learn that the Government may introduce a licensing system. I will not vote to license hunts so that every time a fox is torn apart by a pack of hounds, that happens with the approval of Members of Parliament. I have always voted for a complete ban, and I look forward to doing so again in the near future. I trust that the will of the House will prevail.

7.21 pm

Dr. Richard Taylor (Wyre Forest): It is an honour to follow the many illustrious Members who have spoken. Although I cannot manage without notes I will not be reading my speech, because my writing, like that of many members of my profession, is not particularly legible.

I could not attend the health day debate because, along with other Members, I was visiting the north of England, so I shall devote some of my precious time to health issues. First, however—at the risk of sounding a fearfully discordant note on both sides of the House—I want to say a word about hunting. My constituency, which is split between a rural area and several urban areas, contains three groups: those who are ardently in favour of hunting, those who are ardently against it, and what I consider to be the large majority who wonder what the fuss is all about. I cannot summarise that better than by quoting a columnist who recently described the hunting Bill, in one of the broadsheets, as

"an illiberal interference with other people's weird pleasures that will waste political energy".

I think everyone will welcome the establishment of the railway accident investigation branch, but my constituents will want more. They will want measures to improve railway services. When I travel down to London, it is very common for one or other train to be delayed, and the excuses given are farcical—congestion, for instance, on a line that is lucky to carry two trains a day. Surely the Government could do something about at least one cause of delay. It is inexcusable not to provide a spare guard or driver in order to prevent trains from being delayed owing to the lack of a crew member: that should be illegal.

Few people in my part of north-west Worcestershire support the development of regional governance. I remind the Government of what was said by Lord Falkland, a loyal royalist who tried to moderate Charles I—obviously without much success—and whom I consider to have originated the saying "If it ain't broke don't fix it". What he actually said was

"When it is not necessary to change, it is necessary not to change."

Raising the subject of local government allows me to turn to that of health. I feel that only one part of the system is being blamed for the imposition of charges on social services departments for delayed discharges. The national health service may be at fault, and indeed is at fault on many occasions. I know of an 81-year-old lady who went into hospital. Although her treatment finished after five days, she was in hospital for three weeks and two days because no effort was made to engage in discharge planning. I could also give examples of inappropriate admissions that could have been avoided. Patients themselves have wondered why they have been kept in hospital. The situation has not been helped by inappropriate hospital reconfigurations, and I think that the failure to develop intermediate care services is the fault of the NHS rather than that of social services departments. The charges drive a wedge between social services and health departments, which are bound to compete in passing charges from one side to the other. We should be aiming for closer partnerships.

Let me make two general points about the NHS. First, like most people, I support the Government's extra funding coupled with reforms, but I do not think it profitable for the Government to dwell on the official Opposition's failure to support extra health spending. That, in my view, has devalued questions to the Prime Minister and other Ministers. Secondly, the public know that vast sums are being poured into the NHS and are tremendously pleased about it, but they expect instant improvement. Last week, the Secretary of State himself said

"although there is progress, there is a long way to go."—[*Official Report*, 14 November 2002; Vol. 394, c. 167.]

I wish, in a way, that he had been even more open, admitted to the huge deficit mentioned in the Wanless report, and conceded that initially extra money would be devoted to paying existing debts.

My local primary care trust is battling to manage debts and elements of inflation—in particular, a 15 per cent. rise in prescribing costs. By the end of the current financial year, the three primary care trusts in my county will have a deficit of some £8 million. That is a relatively small proportion of their total budget, but when primary care trusts—as health authorities were—are already being violently squeezed by economies, it is impossible for them to produce the improvements that people expect. I would have liked the Government to explain that money is being spent, that the backlog is being attacked, but that there will not be improvements just yet.

The nationwide debt arouses several suspicions. There is, for instance, the suspicion that extra sums that should have been earmarked for such purposes as the cancer plan are simply being swallowed up by debt. There is the suspicion that emphases on national service framework are penalising conditions to which no such framework applies. There is the suspicion that drugs and treatments approved by the National Institute for Clinical Excellence are leading to a reduction in resources for other well-established, standard treatments.

I will not mention all the aspects of foundation hospitals that worry Members who fear that they will turn the NHS into a two-tier system, because they have been emphasised enough already. It is too early to be over-critical of the proposals, because we are waiting for a detailed prospectus. I welcomed devolution to primary care trusts, so in principle I welcome the devolution of powers to local people, allowing them to own and manage their hospitals; but a criticism of which we have not heard much so far is that foundation hospitals could well drive a wedge between primary and secondary care.

My criticism of primary care trusts is that there is relatively little consultant input; my criticism of foundation hospitals is that there is likely to be very little GP input. I would have liked to think that hospitals and primary care could be welded together somehow, as that would enable more treatments to take place in primary care and fewer in hospitals.

Another fear about foundation hospitals that has not been properly addressed concerns emergency care. It will be easy for foundation hospitals to cope with elective work. Will they also be able to cope—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman has had his time.

7.30 pm

Mr. Neil Turner (Wigan): I welcome much of what is in the Queen's Speech, in particular the opportunity that it gives us finally to decide on hunting with dogs. That issue has dragged on for far too long. Many Labour Members at least will welcome that opportunity.

I want to address my remarks to regional government and local government and the Bills on those. I particularly welcome the opportunity that people throughout the country will have to vote on regional government. Our country is diverse: it has many different cultures, needs and resources. One needs to consider only one aspect, housing, and compare the north-west with the south-east to see how diverse the cultures and needs of two regions can be. Far too much of the governing of this country is centrally controlled, with Whitehall, which in effect means civil servants, taking decisions that should be taken at a much more local level.

Opposition Members who oppose that have tried to portray the issue as being about local identity. That is nonsense. It is not about local identity—the people of Scotland and the people of Wales had clear identities long before they had their Parliament and Assembly. It is about a constitutional settlement and about bringing the governing and governance of our country much closer to people in their particular regions.

Government offices were set up by the Conservative party when it was in power. I went to the Government office for the north-east when I was on the Public Administration Committee. The offices do an excellent job but see themselves as representing the Government in the regions, not as the region's voice in Government. They see themselves as being answerable to Whitehall and central Government, not to the people in the regions whom they are meant to serve.

The offices are not accountable to those regional bodies. They make decisions about resources and where they will go in the regions, yet the people in the regions cannot hold them to account; the democratic ability to achieve accountability is not there. Regional government is important.

Mr. Syms: When England play football, my constituents cheer them and I am sure the hon. Gentleman's constituents do, because we are English; there is a bond there—rather more of a bond than most of my constituents feel for the south-west or, I suspect, some of his constituents feel for the north-west.

Mr. Turner: I am not sure what that means. We do not have a north-west football team or a south-west football team, but when Lancashire plays Yorkshire in rugby league the people of Lancashire and the north-west support the red jerseys of Lancashire, as opposed to the white jerseys of Yorkshire. There is that regional identity in rugby league. Of course, Lancashire always wins, which is even better.

Mr. Gary Streeter (South-West Devon): The hon. Gentleman mentioned that civil servants were not the region's voice in Government, but what does he think Members of Parliament are elected to be; and does he not think that civil servants are accountable—they are accountable to their Ministers and then Ministers are accountable to the House?

Mr. Turner: The hon. Gentleman raises an interesting point. I remember having to go to speak to the Minister for Transport about an important issue in my constituency: a sub-regional road that I said should be built. I had to explain to him in great detail what that was all about. That kind of detail would not have had to be explained if the person responsible were a member of a regional assembly, because he would be aware of what was happening in the region and able to make those decisions by consulting not a Whitehall civil servant but a north-west civil servant.

That is what we are talking about when we talk about regional government. It is about ensuring that the democratic accountability of the civil service is much closer to the people and the decisions that are necessary for communities in the regions. It is important that we understand that what we are talking about here is not a new level of democracy and a new tier of government but replacing the counties with government in the regions and making the existing bureaucracy accountable through the democratic process. Whitehall is inflexible. Being hidebound, it has difficulty meeting the needs of local and regional communities. That is why it is important that we have regional government.

I am sure that the referendums will be successful in the north-west, as they will be in the north-east, with possibly Yorkshire and the west midlands following shortly after, but I am a little concerned about some of the phrasing that I have heard: that we will get the Bill "when parliamentary time allows". It is essential that the two follow one another very quickly: that after Ministers have passed the Act to set up the referendums, it will be followed very quickly by the Act to set up the regional assemblies.

I was pleased that the Deputy Prime Minister made it clear that what we are talking about is ensuring that there is a transfer of powers from central Government to

[Mr. Turner]

regional government, not a transfer up from local government. That is an essential part of the proposals. It is about devolved powers from the centre to the regions and ensuring that accountability is at the lowest possible local level.

I turn to the second Bill. Criticisms have, rightly, been made that its proposals are timid. That needs to be addressed. I hope that the Bill will include provision for a statutory instrument to transfer further powers down. I understand why the Government are a little wary of passing too many powers straight away. They want to ensure that regional government is successful, properly accountable, effective and efficient, but once regional government has proven that it is, I hope that some form a statutory instrument will allow further powers to be passed down, where appropriate—in tertiary education, strategic health, regional transport and so on—without further primary legislation.

I welcome the powers that will be extended to local government by the Local Government Bill. Revaluation was promised; it is important that we have that. If local government is to be successful, it must have a buoyant tax base. I suggest that having a 10-year revaluation would not be not appropriate. I ask the Government to consider having an interim five-year regional percentage increase in the tax bands, and a proper revaluation every 10 years, so that we can iron out the anomalies.

One of the problems is that a millionaire living in a mansion will pay only three times more council tax than someone living in a £30,000 terraced house. That is ridiculous.

Norman Lamb: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Turner: Yes, but I ask the hon. Gentleman to be quick as I have used up my extra time by taking two interventions.

Norman Lamb: Would the hon. Gentleman reach the conclusion that council tax should be abolished and replaced by a local income tax, which is a progressive tax based on the ability to pay, such as applies nationally?

Mr. Turner: If I went down that road, a whole new debate would open up, so I say merely that I do not agree that an income tax for local government should be introduced. It may be an interesting issue for regional government but not for local government.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Edmonton (Mr. Love) said from a sedentary position earlier, we should widen tax bands much more greatly. One of the other things that we need to examine closely is the weighting that is attached to each of the individual bands. As I have said, there is only three times the difference between the lowest and the highest council tax, which cannot be right.

One of the criticisms that was rightly made about the rateable value system was that it was grossly unfair. If we do not take the opportunity of examining both widening the bands and changing the weighting within those bands, the council tax system will be seen as being more and more unfair.

When the Government look at the local government Bill, I hope that they will take the opportunity to ensure that they do not merely revalue the existing bands, but that they widen them and tackle the weighting problem. If they can do that, along with giving local government wider powers and a greater ability to trade and to raise charges, it will be the better for it. I welcome those proposals, along with those relating to regional government. If we can implement them, we will have a better overall system of government.

7.40 pm

Sue Doughty (Guildford): This is a welcome opportunity to talk about some of the issues that have arisen from the Gracious Speech, and some which are missing. I am sorry that a Minister from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs is not here this evening, because the Gracious Speech does include environmental legislation such as the water Bill and the waste emissions trading Bill. The water Bill has been a long time coming. Its aim—to manage the abstraction of water—is very welcome. Some 152 wildlife sites of national importance in England could be damaged by water abstraction, and we need to recognise the importance of our wetland heritage.

The proposals could have gone much further, however. On this occasion, I agree with the right hon. Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague) that nothing has been included to address flood management and prevention. A Bill that included such measures—along with marine habitats legislation, which was lost at the end of the previous Session—could have provided a comprehensive approach to water management and river basin management. Responsibility could have been allocated, so that we could tighten up our handling of this important problem.

There is nothing wrong with the concept of the waste and emissions trading Bill, but the Government rushed it through the Lords last week, even though we are expecting an imminent announcement on waste from the strategy unit. It would be much better to examine that legislation in the context of the strategy unit's comments, rather than picking off a single aspect of waste management. We need to understand what is happening.

I welcome, however, the proposals on waste trading that deal with the question of biodegradable municipal waste that is sent to landfills. As recently as last week, when efforts were made in Guildford to separate garden waste at source for recycling, rather than sending it to landfill, Conservatives said, "No, we don't want this scheme." They would not even allow us to discuss how it might be funded. Disgracefully, they got Labour support because, for some curious reason, the Conservatives said, "We don't want the Liberal Democrats to add that to their recycling figures." Next, they will criticise us for our recycling figures. That is the way it goes.

We also need a clear definition of what recycling rates really mean. Do they mean what we collect for recycling, or what is actually sent for recycling? So often, householders complain to us, "I fear that, in the end, what I put in my green box will be sent for landfill." We need clear standards and definitions. I hope that the Government will take the opportunity to examine the

European Committee for Standardisation's draft definition of recycling, so that we can compare how we perform not only within this country, but across Europe, according to internationally agreed standards. We can go a lot further in this regard.

I turn to the problems associated with living in the south-east. Those of us who represent constituencies in the south-east often wonder why the Government have it in for us. The concept exists that we must all be fearfully rich because we live in the south-east, but that is not true of teachers, policemen, or those who work in administrative jobs in the region. Yet underpinning the proposals for Government funding in the south-east is the assumption that, for some reason, teachers do not have live in the expensive houses that we have in the region. Such an assumption would explain why we do not get decent allowances for teachers living in the south-east. Every child in the region knows what it is like to have a good teacher who moves away once they have acquired two or three years' experience. Year on year, there is a 25 per cent. churn of teachers leaving Surrey for jobs outside the county. The situation is similar with the police: officers are leaving either for cheaper areas, or for London. Yet the figures for local government funding, and for national funding for the police, ignore the fact that ours is an expensive area. The attitude is, "You are doing badly now, but by the time we have finished with you, you'll be doing even worse." We in Surrey expect the police to be able to look after us, yet the funding will reduce policing to an unacceptable level.

On social services, as I have said before, I have never been given a satisfactory answer as to why funding for older people in Surrey is much lower than elsewhere, even though people live longer in counties such as ours. Just because people live longer, it does not mean that they are sprightly to the end of their days. They have their needs, yet funding for them is penalised. Where do the Government think that social services are going to put older people? There is constant underfunding, and the threat of fines. Social services can pay only £480 a week for a place in nursing home accommodation, yet the likely charge in Surrey will be £840 a week. There are precious few places for people. We do not want to incarcerate people in acute wards; we want them to receive appropriate care. However, the Government have done nothing to generate the care home and nursing home places that we need.

I turn to the scandal of the 49 delayed discharges at the Royal Surrey County hospital. Of those 49 delayed discharges, 17 were awaiting funding. Eleven were funded, but there was no place for them to go to. Fines will not help that situation, but a realistic approach from the Government might.

Mr. Andrew Love (Edmonton): I am listening carefully to what the hon. Lady is saying. Does she accept that the guaranteed 6 per cent. real-terms increase in social services funding over the next three years will do something to address the problems that she highlights?

Sue Doughty: In fact, that 6 per cent. real-terms increase will come off the other end—through the money that goes to the county council—so we will not see all of that increase. We have been working hard within the NHS, and with social services, to invest wisely the additional Government funding that we have received: in the provision of care places, and in training people to provide care of home. With respect, that 6 per cent. will have to go a long way before it deals with the problems that I am outlining. Too much of my surgery time is taken up in dealing with these issues. It is not a question of social services failing, as has been suggested in respect of some areas; they are being run ragged trying to secure those places. They are working with the NHS, but they are not succeeding.

The Gracious Speech makes no reference to one of the saddest issues that I have to deal with. In that sense, the Speech offers no cause for hope. Last month, I had the honour of attending the official opening of Christopher's, a hospice for life-limited children from counties surrounding Guildford, and from south-west London. If it were not for the shortage of time, I could talk at length about the wonderful work that it does looking after children—and their families—at this particularly difficult, final stage, and even afterwards. The things that it achieves are truly breathtaking. Christopher's was built with lottery money and funds raised privately; it certainly was not built with any NHS money. It has to pay for services that it receives from the local primary care trust. It has a wide catchment area, and there is only a small number of children in each of the PCTs, so it does not figure at all in budget lines. When I raised that point with the then Minister earlier this year, I was told that the cause of children's hospices would be picked up by the national service framework for children. Even so, the cause of life-limited children is simply tacked on to that of children with disabilities. Their numbers are small, and they do not figure sufficiently.

Children's hospices do not expect the NHS to pick up the bill—that is the nature of the hospice movement, and children's hospices are no different. However, the cost of the necessary medical care at Chistopher's—the nurses and doctors—is about £300,000 a year. It should not be paid for by fundraising. Medical staff should be paid for through the NHS. It is a simple problem to solve and capping could be put in place. We need more Government support.

Mr. Dawson: Does not the hon. Lady think that she is a little too quick to dismiss the national service framework for children when it has not yet been published? Would not it be more advisable to communicate her concerns about the issue to Professor Aynsley-Green who is preparing the framework?

Sue Doughty: I am disappointed to hear that intervention. This issue has been rumbling around for some years and has been raised by the all-party group on hospices and the Chase Children's Hospice Movement. Hospices need to plan their finances and they need to be able to budget. Despite going to see the Minister and visits with Government representatives, I am sorry to say that we have seen nothing. We thought that we might see something from the cancer cash, but fortunately, owing to improvements in cancer treatment for children, only 8 per cent. of childhood deaths are from cancer, so that will not be a source of money. The subject needs serious consideration and I look forward

[Sue Doughty]

to the national service framework, because we need to see a commitment to the treatment and care of children in hospices.

7.51 pm

Mr. Wayne David (Caerphilly): I welcome Her Majesty's most Gracious Speech. As we have heard, its emphasis is very much on crime and antisocial behaviour. I welcome that, because every week constituents from some of the poorest parts of my constituency attend my surgery to complain about antisocial behaviour. I am particularly pleased that there will be measures to control airguns. I recognise that there are many other important measures in the speech, not least those on devolution, on which I wish to concentrate in my speech.

The Gracious Speech refers to a new Bill for health services in Wales. The Bill is significant because the Welsh Assembly proposed it. It has been debated in this House in pre-legislative form, but the ideas came from Cardiff, and that is important in constitutional terms.

The Gracious Speech promises legislation for referendums in English regions where there is deemed to be a demand for devolution. I welcome those measures because my interest in devolution goes back many years. I remember the alternative regional strategy, which was proposed in 1982 by the right hon. Member for Hull, East (Mr. Prescott). In the 1990s, I remember Bruce Millan, a former Secretary of State for Scotland and European Commissioner, coming up with ideas through the Labour party's regional policy commission. I recognise that the recent White Paper and the reference in the Queen's Speech is the culmination of many years' work.

As well as the debate that has been taking place in England and on a United Kingdom basis, we have also seen the fruition of debates in London, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. If devolution is good enough for Scotland and Wales, it should be good enough for the English regions. I say that because I do not believe that devolution is about nationalism; I believe that it is about democracy. Speaking as a Welsh Member, I believe that the Welsh Assembly has been a success. Some people might say that there were one or two hiccups at the beginning, but very few people now doubt the value of its existence. It has become the focal point of Welsh politics and is being seen increasingly as an example of good practice for other parts of the United Kingdom to emulate.

It is notable that both Wales and Scotland have unitary systems of local government. That seems to be the natural way forward when there are regional tiers of government. That is a logical proposal that was aired in the White Paper. We should also recognise that some hon. Members have expressed concern that devolution to the English regions might mean a loss of powers for local authorities. We should look at the evidence. That has not happened in Wales. In fact, we have seen a strong and constructive partnership between the Welsh Assembly and local authorities; they work well together.

As I have said, the rationale for devolution is democracy, but I believe that a further strong argument in favour of devolution is the economic imperative. Over the past 20 years, we have seen widening disparities between different regions of the United Kingdom. Labour Members recognise that there is a need for a strong regional policy. We do not want the type of regional policy that we have had in the past, with winning companies being picked out or benevolent civil servants deciding in London what is best for the regions. We want a regional policy that is rooted in the regions and is developed according to specific needs and specific circumstances.

We should take note of what has happened in many European regions over the past 20 years. It is no accident that some of the most prosperous and dynamic European regions have strong, proactive regional administrations.

Angus Robertson: Will the hon. Gentleman concede that sub-state legislatures across Europe and Governments tend, universally, to have more powers than either the Welsh Assembly or the Scottish Parliament? If he concedes that, will he mention one power that the Welsh Assembly or the Scottish Parliament has to end the relative economic decline of Wales and Scotland, compared to other parts of the UK?

Mr. David: Across Europe some legislatures have more powers and others do not. It is difficult to come up with a mechanistic formula and say that it is simply cause and effect. What we see in many European regions is a focus for their identity. We see a lever at regional level that provides a focus for the effective development of new partnerships.

Andrew George: The hon. Gentleman referred to European regionalisation. I am sure that he will have noticed that appendix E of the White Paper provides a number of examples, all of which demonstrate variable geography and variable geometry? He mentioned identity. To what extent does he believe that the standardised government regions properly reflect regional identities?

Mr. David: They do to a large extent, but it is not perfect.

The White Paper suggests that the issue will be looked at and that there will be consultation. As I understand it, nothing is cast in stone. We need a constructive debate, but at this stage it is important to establish the principle, which is absolutely sound.

France has traditionally been one of the most centralised countries in Europe, but Prime Minister Raffarin is proposing the devolution of power to the regions. Many parts of the UK draw successfully on European structural funds. The White Paper recognises that there is a need for regional intervention at European level so as to articulate the needs of specific regions. There is also a reference to the single programme document, which is an important strategic document that draws up the plans for the use of the funds in a particular area. I remind hon. Members that, since the last European election, Members of the European Parliament have been elected on a regional basis. We will therefore see greater co-ordination and a partnership between MEPs and regional authorities.

Some hon. Members may still claim that the assemblies will have few powers. I beg to disagree. My reading of the White Paper is that the new assemblies will have significant strategic powers for sustainable development, planning, transport, housing, culture and, of course and crucially, economic development strategies. The proposed assemblies might even have greater financial powers than the Welsh Assembly. It is suggested in the White Paper that regional assemblies might have the power to borrow to fund capital expenditure and for cash management purposes. The Welsh Assembly does not have those powers, so people should not dismiss the powers that the English regional assemblies may have.

Regional devolution will provide the opportunity for greater democracy and more dynamic regional economic policies and will reinforce the unity of the United Kingdom while at the same time celebrating its diversity. I hope that the Queen's Speech will receive the full support of the House, especially its proposals for regional government, which should be warmly received.

8.2 pm

David Burnside (South Antrim): Two aspects of the Queen's Speech cause me major concern, one of which affects the whole nation and the other Northern Ireland specifically. The most depressed economic sector of our society is the farming community. I am old-fashioned: I call people farmers, not sectors of the rural economy. The farming community is going through a worse crisis, economically and personally, than any other sector of our society.

Twenty or 30 years before the price support structure of the European Union was put in place, some sectors of farming would always be doing well while others were doing badly: pigs, barley and beef would be good, but dairy would be bad. Under a more fixed farming system, fortunes went up and down. As a Member from Northern Ireland, I support the present price support system because our farming community needs it, but it is not right and it is not working. Unless the Government face up to what appears to be a continuation of the system of production-led price support cobbled together by the French and Germans, we will never have a highly profitable and successful farming industry.

It is disappointing that the Queen's Speech proposes no help for the farming industry, especially when the Government can find time for a vicious little Bill to repress a minority sporting interest—a countryside pursuit called hunting with dogs. I do not hunt, but I fish and shoot and I understand the strong personal views on hunting with hounds. The House should not consider wasting its time acting as an elected dictatorship to force through legislation to repress a minority interest. The countryside and the farming community have much more pressing needs.

Mr. Edwards: Does the hon. Gentleman regard the hunting of badgers as a minority interest? Does he think that that should have been abolished?

David Burnside: The hon. Gentleman obviously knows very little about the countryside. I assume that he wishes to protect the foxes, but if the House pushes through the Bill on foxhunting, more foxes will be shot, wounded and killed by the farming community, so his objective will not be achieved.

The second aspect concerns the government of regions. I suppose that Northern Ireland is a region, although we traditionally call ourselves a province. It is disappointing that the Queen's Speech refers to the further implementation of the Belfast agreement. We do not have regional government in Northern Ireland. The powers of the 26 councils are minuscule and we do not have a form of devolution at Stormont for one reason: the Government are not prepared to introduce legislation to expel terrorist-led political parties from the executive government of Northern Ireland. The democrats are being punished. We cannot have devolution because Sinn Fein-IRA is not prepared to give up its two-pronged approach to politics—democracy during the day and terrorism and criminality at night. We all suffer. We do not have accountable local government. I hope that the regions of England will get accountable, strong local government, not some super-tier of regional government that means nothing.

The Government have, however, found time for legislation on the further reform of policing. We have had reform of policing—we had the Patten report—and sometimes reform is not reform. The Royal Ulster Constabulary, a highly respected, strong police force that dealt with terrorism and crime, was ripped apart, demoralised and reorganised for political reasons, not for sound policing reasons. Crime has increased and the threat of terrorism continues, but the Government promise us more police reform in this Session.

I hope that the elected dictatorship in this House will realise that the Unionist, law-abiding, pro-democratic parties in Northern Ireland—although we have only a small minority voice here—will not go along with reforms that bring terrorists on to the district police partnerships in the Province. If that is what the Government plan, it will be a rough Session, because the Unionists and the democratic parties in Northern Ireland will not participate in the other institutions of the agreement that still exist. If the Government can find time only for more concessions to republicanism, it says little for their respect for those of us who are trying to be democrats in Northern Ireland and who want widespread cross-community consensus with our Catholic and nationalist neighbours in an institution at Stormont that works. At present, we feel marginalised because the only people who get concessions from the Government are those who use the threat of force.

I hope that the Government will give some time to the farming community. It is not big in numbers or votes. Perhaps it does not fit in to the focus groups of new Labour, but it is an essential part of our society.

Mr. Jeffrey M. Donaldson (Lagan Valley): My hon. Friend mentions the farming community, but he will be aware of the serious risk to the fishing industry in Northern Ireland as a result of the severe limitations on cod fishing. Our colleagues in Scotland share our concern. Will he join me in urging the Government properly to protect the interests of the British fishing industry, especially in Scotland and Northern Ireland?

David Burnside: My hon. Friend is right. The white fish industry in the Irish sea catches cod and similar fish.

[David Burnside]

It will be destroyed if the scientific report is implemented, as will the communities of Kilkeel, Portavogie and Ardglass, and the great fishing industry in Scotland. It is time for the Government to stand up for the national interest, as decommissioning can go only so far in our fishing industry. After that, there would be nothing left—no ships, and no people working in the ports. I agree completely with my hon. Friend.

We want accountable government in Northern Ireland. The Government should give priority to working with the democrats in Northern Ireland to achieve something that is workable and accountable. I hope that the English regions also get accountable and powerful local government, and not some quango super-tier of nothingness.

8.10 pm

Mr. Peter Pike (Burnley): I do not know enough to get involved in an argument about Northern Ireland with the hon. Member for South Antrim (David Burnside), but I believe that most people there want a peaceful future. It is the responsibility of the House to support all those who want a peaceful future in Northern Ireland, and all those who want to achieve it through democratic means. I disagree with many of the points that the hon. Member for South Antrim made, although I know that he feels strongly about them. However, I hope that we can achieve peace in the Province—or the region, as the hon. Gentleman called it.

The hon. Member for South Antrim mentioned the Bill to ban hunting with dogs, about which I strongly disagree with him. The Government should bring forward a simple Bill, as the people of this country believe that it is time to reach a decision. The more quickly we take that decision, the better.

I support the Government in introducing further controls on fireworks. The season gets longer and longer, and fireworks intended only for display purposes now get into the wrong hands. They are a growing nuisance for many people and animals, and many consider that it could soon be time to allow fireworks to be sold for display purposes only. That might be regrettable in some ways, but we must consider the option carefully if we cannot control or remove the nuisance in any other way.

Antisocial behaviour is another issue on which I shall support any measures that the Government may introduce. Such behaviour has become a common and growing problem throughout the country, and it is right that we should take steps to ensure that a minority are not allowed to destroy the lives of the majority. Regrettably, that is what is happening at the moment.

I have long been a supporter of regional government. Introducing it is the right thing to do, and I have seen what the regional development agency in my area has achieved. Just over a year ago we had the bad news about Michelin, but the RDA has acquired the site and taken matters forward. An elected and accountable regional assembly would be able to do even more to deal with issues of strategic importance, such as transport, investment and employment, and I strongly support the proposal.

I am glad to say that Burnley borough council also strongly supports a regional assembly, and there has been a meeting of all local authority leaders in the area. The leader of the county council and the chief executives of the two unitary authorities attended, and they backed the proposal that Preston should be the main town in the north-west region. I advocated that 10 years ago, so I am glad that some people agree that Manchester or Liverpool should not be the automatic options. Putting the assembly in Preston, which has good communications, would prevent us from having to choose between those two big cities.

My hon. Friend the Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew) said that we should not isolate local government reform from the question of the regions. I agree; I believe that unitary authorities represent the best way forward. The Conservative Government failed to deal with the local government problem, and the Banham commission and local authorities, too, failed to seize the opportunity to tackle it. It is important that we tackle it now.

In Lancashire, there are many opinions about how the county council has handled the future of old people's homes. Another difficulty in the area involves secondary high schools. Some parents have set up what they call a do-it-yourself school in Burnley, because they do not consider that the places provided for their children are acceptable. There are no easy solutions to such problems, but a unitary authority would be much closer to the people. That is why I strongly support the proposition.

Local government finance is another issue that the Government must deal with this year. In a letter to the *Burnley Express* last week, a constituent called R.M. Carruthers asked why Burnley did not get a fairer grant. The letter recounted how, before the 1997 election, I had spoken about the inequality of the local government grant allocation, and about what a Labour Government would do about it. Mr. Carruthers asked why nothing had been done—but I believe that action on the matter will not be long delayed.

A recent report from Burnley borough council stated:

"When the present Government was elected in 1997, it undertook to review the grant distribution system."

The report then refers to the Green Paper published in 2000, and says that Burnley borough council is getting less in grant, 11 years later, than it was when the present local grant system was first introduced. Taking into account inflation of about 25 per cent., that means that we are considerably worse off now. Changes need to be made, and I hope that a fairer system can be devised. People do not understand how, although a district authority collects the council tax, some 80 per cent. of it goes to the county.

My final point concerns housing problems in Burnley, about which I receive letters every day. I received two letters today alone, and the first described how the writer lived in fear every day and night that her house was going to be vandalised and set on fire. That is a real problem. There are 4,500 empty houses in the area, more than 10 per cent. of the housing stock. The writer says:

"Perhaps if you was in my position you could comprehend my dilemma, it dominates my life."

The writer said that the problem was also affecting the lives of the other people in her family. Another correspondent wrote to tell me that a copy of the

document "Your Housing Update" had arrived, but that his area was not covered in the next group action scheme. The writer said that he would have to sell his house, at 25 per cent. of its value.

That is typical of the problems that so many people encounter. There are many empty houses, and many people whose houses have lost their value. I get two or three letters on the subject every day, and people come to my advice surgeries every week with similar stories. People are living in a nightmare of fear because the council is unable to tackle the problem.

My noble Friend Lord Rooker, the Minister of State in the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister who has responsibility for housing, planning and regeneration, wrote to me to say:

"I visited East Lancashire on 1 October and saw for myself the severe housing problems that you face. I can well appreciate the blight on lives and communities that low demand causes, and the Government is as determined as ever to tackle the problem."

Burnley is one of the pathfinder project areas for housing renewal. We received £2.66 million, but we need hundreds of millions of pounds—£670 million in east Lancashire—if the problem is to be solved. We need a commitment over 10 years, and I believe that we are getting very near to that. I have no doubt that my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister will announce good news for Burnley and east Lancashire in January.

However, because of the time needed for appropriate preparations, the news announced in January will come some months before any programme can be implemented, so I urge the Government to accept that they have a responsibility to the people of Burnley and east Lancashire to do something now, before it is too late. People are desperate, and cannot wait any longer for Government action.

8.19 pm

Mr. Gary Streeter (South-West Devon): I am pleased to follow the hon. Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike). He spoke with great passion about the problem of empty homes in his constituency and housing issues in general. I would not have believed that part of his speech had I not, four or five months ago, walked around Manchester and seen street after street in which two thirds of the homes were boarded up. I come from Devon nice parts, so that was a shock. The hon. Gentleman spoke with great power and passion, and I hope that his right hon. and hon. Friends on the Treasury Bench are listening.

Although the hon. Gentleman represents Burnley and I represent Plymouth and part of Devon, we are in the same region: it is a region that I call England. We do not need England to be carved up into artificial regions to help us run our affairs. With the increasing use of technology, it should be easier to run things with the systems available. We should not create artificial divisions.

I am pleased to take part in the debate on the Queen's Speech. We welcome many of the proposals in the Gracious Speech, especially some of the criminal justice measures. There is no doubt in my mind that tackling crime is one of the most important issues. I also welcomed the Home Secretary's statement today.

Once upon a time, the Prime Minister talked about the causes of crime. Unless Parliament and the Government start to tackle some of the causes of crime and go upstream and intervene at that juncture, no matter how many Bills we pass, how many new gimmicks we introduce and how many more policemen we put on the beat, we will not solve the crime and antisocial behaviour problems facing the nation.

Two upstream issues are vital. First, it is essential that when heroin addicts or crack cocaine users make the brave decision to kick the habit, they should have immediate access to treatment. Three months later, six months later—or, as in some parts of the country, two years later—is not soon enough. They will change their minds, and continue to fund their habit through crime. They are caught up in their misery, and their families—and all of us—suffer. I was disappointed that there was nothing in the Queen's Speech about access to treatment for drug addicts, and I hope that the Government will take note of my comments.

Even further upstream is the issue of what goes on in some homes. Over the 10 years that I have been a Member of Parliament, I have spoken to many primary school teachers. When four or five-year-olds come into their schools, the teachers know who will fall through the fingers of the system, who is likely to underachieve, who has not received the parenting, love, support, encouragement and discipline that they require, and who is already out of control. We need better systems of early intervention to bring to bear on youngsters at that early, upstream stage if we are to tackle crime further downstream.

The Government partly created the problem that they now seek to solve by bringing into force referendums for regional government. In creating regional development agencies with no accountability, they introduced this unnecessary problem, which they now propose to tackle with an unwanted solution. It will mean government further away from the people. There is one obstacle to regional government that I cannot get over. If the Government have their way, it is likely that in a few years some parts of the country will have regional government and others will not—and that may be a long-term settlement. Can anyone in the Chamber name any other country in the world with such a dyslexic system of government that there is regional government in some parts of it and not in others? It will become a Trivial Pursuit question in America to name the country that has regional government in some parts and not in others. It will become a question for German students of politics and geography. An exam question for students in the future will be, "Does the United Kingdom have regional government?" and no one will be able to answer it.

Angus Robertson: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that there is asymmetric devolution in Spain? Some parts of that nation have devolved institutions and other parts do not.

Mr. Streeter: The hon. Gentleman gives Spain as an example. Is that the country on which we should model our constitution? Is that what the Government are offering the people of the United Kingdom? I wish they would make that clear in their statements.

The Queen's Speech was a lost opportunity in relation to housing. I know that the Government's heart is in the right place, and that they care about standards in

[Mr. Streeter]

housing and the provision of sufficient affordable housing for those who require it. However, the point that they continue to miss is that the current housing crisis is not just a continuation of the need to provide good quality social housing. A new crisis has broken out in recent years. There is a lack of affordable housing to buy in many areas. People face that problem not only in London and the south-east but in many other parts of the country. It affects key workers, such as nurses, firefighters, local government officers and the police, who do not want to live in rented accommodation all their lives. The Government continually fail to understand that. Key workers want affordable housing to buy, and at the moment they cannot access it. They are part of the 85 per cent. of the population who want to own their own home.

In rural parts of the country, such as my area, local people living in towns and villages cannot afford to stay, to buy and to live locally, because they have been priced out of the housing market. Some of those villages have existed since the 15th century and are now under threat of falling apart, because the old balance of rich and poor has changed. People from all backgrounds used to live cheek by jowl in the successful model for living called village life. That is under threat because local people cannot afford to buy.

I had hoped that the Government would try to tackle that problem in the Queen's Speech, but they have not done so.

Mr. Love: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that the best way to address an increase in demand for housing such as he has described in his constituency is by an increase in the supply? Does he think that Members who say, "Not in my backyard," are creating the problem in his area?

Mr. Streeter: I am grateful for that intervention. There is an issue of supply, but other factors are at work. In South Hams in my constituency, second homes are a real contributor to the upsurge in house prices. Twelve per cent. of homes in South Hams are second homes. I agree with the provision in the Queen's Speech that the 50 per cent. council tax discount should be removed, and I very much hope and expect that South Hams council will surge to imposing a 100 per cent. council tax on such homes. That will not provide more houses, but I think that it will raise £1 million for the council to spend—on housing need, perhaps.

More and more people now work in London and live, not in the suburbs or even in the counties immediately around London, but well out in other parts of the country. With their London salaries, they are inflating house prices all over the country.

I call upon the Government to do three things in the next 12 months and I hope that these measures will be in the local government Bill, when we finally see it. First, they should recognise that the problem of affordable housing to buy is not just a London or a south-east issue; it is an issue in many rural parts of the country, especially the south-west. Challenge funding of £200 million, modest amount though that is, certainly needs to be open to other parts of the country, not just the south-east.

Secondly, I call upon the Government to undergo a paradigm shift—which is not as painful as it sounds. Whenever anyone raises the subject of affordable housing with this Government, they think of social housing to rent. It should be recognised that the current crisis is in affordable housing to buy. That is the "now" issue. The Government must not fight the last war, and we need new ideas to help us to get to grips with that problem.

My third point—this is my contribution to the debate—is that the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister needs to do some blue-skies thinking to create a new form of legal tenure that will help us to tackle the problem. My suggestion is that we should create a new form, which I would call "localhold", whereby a developer who builds a housing estate in any area with high housing prices and relatively low wages has to ensure that one tenth of the properties are available for local people who have been resident for three years to purchase. Those people would own the house outright, but they would be able to sell only to someone else who has been resident in the district for three years, or to someone who moves from a similar type of property. There should be tax incentives for developers to make such provision, and even more incentives if they provide more than the allotted 10 per cent. The constraint on the ability to purchase a house of that type should ensure that the affordability element is passed on to future purchasers. One problem with all the existing schemes is that the affordability element is not available to purchasers down the line.

I want the Government to recognise that there is a crisis in affordable housing to buy. They should be engaging in blue-skies thinking and coming up with workable solutions to solve that problem, and I am disappointed that the Queen's Speech remains strangely silent on the issue.

8.30 pm

David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire): I am pleased to be able to make a short contribution on two of the topics scheduled for debate—transport, focusing on aviation, and the environment.

It is a great disappointment to me, as a member of the Select Committee on Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, that the Gracious Speech made no reference to any Government plans to give greater protection to the hundreds of communities throughout the country whose quality of life is so seriously affected by the impact of nearby airports. That is particularly important to my constituency, as it contains East Midlands airport, which although an economic asset to the region, already causes significant local problems especially because of the scale and nature of its night freight flights. Any major increase in flying activities could produce totally unacceptable consequences for many people who live in the vicinity, which includes tens of thousands of people in the constituencies of North-West Leicestershire, South Derbyshire, Loughborough and Rushcliffe.

I am pleased to see the Secretary of State for Transport in his place. On 23 July 2002, when he made his statement on the future development of air transport in the United Kingdom, he said

"doing nothing is not an option."—[*Official Report*, 23 July 2002; Vol. 389, c. 847.]

As I said in the House that same day, if he meant that it was not an option to do nothing to give airport communities a decent environmental framework to protect them

"in particular from the corrosive and damaging effects of night noise"—[*Official Report*, 23 July 2002; Vol. 389, c. 860],

he was right.

The national options for airport expansion have been hugely controversial and have been triggered by the enormous growth in air travel in recent decades. In 1970, UK air passengers totalled 32 million. By 1980, that figure had grown to 58 million. By 1990, it was 102 million and by 2000, it was 180 million. Discounting all environmental constraints on growth and extrapolating in a way that would make any half-decent statistician blush, the Government are forecasting passenger numbers soaring through the stratosphere to 275 million by 2010, 400 million by 2020 and more than 500 million by 2030.

For the aviation industry to urge our nation to predict and provide for growth on that scale is absolutely unsustainable. For the industry to promote it without a proper evaluation of the impact and the alternatives is simply irresponsible. If the Government are to ensure that the future of the aviation industry is to be a sustainable one, some management of demand has to be undertaken.

Three types of action commend themselves: fiscal measures to end the unfair tax breaks; higher rail investment; and tighter environmental limits. First, the huge anomaly of tax-free aviation fuel must end, although that will require international agreement. In the meantime, the Government can consider a noise or a fuel tax for internal flights, or ending aviation's zero VAT rating status. By 2030, this Al Capone of the travel industry will be avoiding tax to the tune of £30 billion per year.

A second option is to extend transport choice by greater investment in rail, which would allow a better use of existing airport space for long-haul flights. The report "From Planes to Trains" shows that almost half of all flights in Europe are less than 300 miles and have great potential for transfer to rail.

Finally, management of demand can be achieved by giving the aviation industry clear operating standards aimed at developing new technology to reduce its impact. Tight national limits need to be spelt out and central control of the London airports, achieved by a designation under the Civil Aviation Act 1982, must be extended to the larger regional airports.

Doing nothing is not an option, especially for people near regional airports who would pay the real costs of unrestrained growth—the huge tracts of unspoilt countryside bulldozed to make way for concrete and tarmac; the thousands of acres of ugly commercial sprawl; the loss of wildlife habitats; and the massive traffic congestion. Local villages, such as Diseworth in my constituency, would be changed out of recognition, while the ancient and beautiful churches in villages such as Breedon would be at risk because their Saxon builders failed to ensure that they were nowhere near a flight path.

Worst of all are the air pollution and intolerable noise and disturbance from night flights. A few days ago, I received the following email:

"Good morning Mr Taylor,

Well it's 04.31 on the 15th November and again I have been disturbed by night flights from EMA. Several have powered over the house in Thringstone..and again I can't sleep because just as I doze off another one goes over..as I have a health problem that makes sleep somewhat of a precious commodity..it looks like it might be a case of having to medicate in order to get some at all. A wonderful state of affairs, having to use drugs to be able to sleep because someone is disturbing the Peace, though if I disturbed the slumber of the EMA chairman I'd get arrested."

Nocturnal noise is a growing problem at British airports. It can affect quality of sleep and thus performance at school and work and, ultimately, it can affect health. The Queen's Speech would have been more welcome if it had taken steps to combat the sources and levels of unnecessary noise in our country. A consistent approach to environmental regulation at all our airports is fundamental. We can achieve that only if the national aviation policy, which will emerge next spring in the Government's aviation White Paper, has a common comprehensive framework for noise control. There must be equity and fairness between individual airports as to the environmental regulation required—a level runway, as it were.

Airport communities throughout the land are closely following the appeal by the Government against the decision of the European Court of Human Rights that Heathrow is violating human rights by depriving people of a night's sleep without sufficient justification. Villages near East Midlands airport certainly hope that the ECHR verdict will be upheld, as that large regional airport is unique in having no limit on night flights.

Unsurprisingly, there has been a wave of local protest from a wide range of organisations about the Department of Transport's midlands aviation consultation paper. On Saturday, it will culminate in a large peaceful protest against a second runway. I wholly support the action group Wings in its campaign objectives of no new runway, no expansion outside the existing airport boundaries and no further increase in airport capacity without the most stringent environmental constraints.

I commend and support the work of other local community organisations, such as PAIN—People Against Intrusive Noise—and parish council groups such as AARPC—the Association of Airport-Related Parish Councils—in their fight for a better quality of life for their members in the face of a powerful aviation lobby. Throughout the land, similar groups are engaged in that uneven struggle.

We must all challenge the flawed basis of the consultation process—the forecasts for air travel and freight flights until 2030 and the questionnaires specially written by highly paid civil servants to set communities from each airport area against one another. We must show that it would be highly irresponsible not to consider demand management; otherwise, irreversible environmental damage will result. The Queen's Speech should have flagged up an intention to act on aviation.

The growth in aviation is out of control only because it is exempt from many of the controls that have applied to other industries for many years. Why should the polluter not pay? Why should there not be an end to

[David Taylor]

public subsidy to aviation? Why should not land use planning law require all proposed airport developments to detail their full environmental impacts?

Aviation has economic and social benefits, although they are not as substantial as the ubiquitous lobbyists would have us believe. Its down sides, although widely documented, are not fully understood by politicians and decision makers. Is it not time to listen to the airport communities and to hear their counter-arguments to the excessively grandiose self-promotion of the aviation industry?

Many of the options in the aviation consultation papers are environmentally disastrous and socially unacceptable. The Government really are flying into trouble.

8.39 pm

Mr. Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield): I start by drawing the House's attention to my interests, which are declared in the Register of Members' Interests, and by congratulating the right hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) and the hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Bow (Ms King) on the excellence with which they proposed and seconded the Loyal Address. I take some pleasure in mentioning that because it is exactly 10 years since I seconded a Loyal Address, when I was unwise enough to refer to Kenneth, now Lord, Baker as a genial old codger on the way out and myself, somewhat remissly, as an oily young man on the make. So I know just what a terrifying experience it was for the hon. Member for Bethnal Green and Bow.

I should comfort the hon. Lady by saying that, almost immediately I had had that experience, I was made a Minister, and so excellent was her speech that I very much hope that that will be her fate as well. However, I should also warn her that all five of those who seconded the Loyal Address between 1992 and 1997 lost their seats at the subsequent general election. I do not know quite how high Bethnal Green and Bow is on the list of seats that we Conservatives hope to win, but I am sure that she should beware on that count.

The Queen's Speech was best summed up in an excellent interview in the *Financial Times* on Saturday, in which Sir John Mortimer—a long-time Labour supporter—described the Government as follows:

"I had great hopes of Labour in 1997, but now I think they have gone totally raving mad; totally dotty."

Hon. Members may think that a reasonable precis of our amendment, but all I can say is that, if luvvies and lawyers are now deserting the Labour party, it cannot be much longer before all the rest do likewise.

I should like to dodge in and out of the amendment that was so ably moved by my right hon. Friend the Member for Haltemprice and Howden (David Davis). I start by addressing the Government's failures, to which the amendment draws attention, in so far as they relate to business. I have previously made a point of praising the Chancellor of Exchequer for some of the things that he has done. Indeed, a disgruntled Conservative Whip approached me to point out the place in *Hansard* where I referred to him as an excellent Chancellor—it is very good to know that other people apart from ourselves read our speeches in *Hansard*—but the truth is that the Chancellor of the Exchequer has done many very wise things.

We in this country have had 10 years of unparalleled economic prosperity—five under Labour and five under the Conservatives. It would be good if the Chancellor would pay tribute to my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Rushcliffe (Mr. Clarke) and Lord Lamont for laying the foundations of that prosperity, but it is clearly true that the Government's chickens are coming home to roost. The effects of tax increases of £47 billion, to which the CBI drew attention last week, and the enormous increase in red tape are now evident in our economy, and I greatly fear what will happen to unemployment levels during the next 18 months.

All business surveys show that business confidence is in decline. We all warned—it is clearly on the record in *Hansard*—that the absurdly over-optimistic growth forecasts that the Chancellor of the Exchequer espoused earlier this year would prove to be totally fallacious. As always with Labour Governments, he will end up with fixed spending plans and the necessity to borrow or increase taxation. In the Chancellor's case, as hubris moves to nemesis, he will see what will happen to the economy.

We in this country have already had a massive tax increase, but where are the improvements in services? The amendment refers to the health service and education, and I want to make a point about both. There has been a limited effect on waiting lists, but the truth is that those waiting lists mask the fact that thousands of families—not a week goes by in Sutton Coldfield when I do not see one of them—are forced to go private. Those families club together to ensure that, say, an elderly relative can receive treatment more quickly than is possible in the health service.

Targets have been skewed not on clinical need, but on the Government's political needs. The position on health has not improved anything like as radically as we were promised and, into the bargain, I am very concerned about the Government's treatment of Good Hope hospital, which is in my constituency, in the past six months, and I shall return to that point on another occasion.

The same failure to deliver is true in education. At a speech day that I attended in my constituency last Friday, the excellent headmistress urged me in her speech to tell the Government—I do so with pleasure tonight—that there must be

"no more change; let us now enhance and improve what we have in place."

I joined a meeting of secondary heads in my constituency last Friday, and also recently visited St. Joseph's Catholic primary school in Sutton Coldfield. Teachers and heads alike complain of the 79 different funding streams that they are seeking to access, and of the very uncertain ongoing levels of education funding in Sutton Coldfield, which makes planning extremely difficult. They point out that, since the Government came to power, 17 pages of regulations have been issued for every school day. They also point out that one need

only look at the advertising in newspapers, especially in *The Times Higher Education Supplement*, to see the grave recruiting difficulties in our schools at this time.

Mr. Dawson: On the hon. Gentleman's tour of schools in his constituency, did he take any time to quantify the amount of capital investment that had been put into their facilities?

Mr. Mitchell: Of course. The hon. Gentleman heard me refer to the 79 funding streams, all of which represent extra money available for schools. If he listens carefully to what I am saying, however, he will realise that I am pointing out the difficulties inherent in the way that the Government have looked after education.

I shall pass over the A-levels fiasco of this summer to mention briefly the issue of top-up fees. I believe that top-up fees are a truly appalling proposition. I went along with the Conservative Government over student loans with a certain heaviness of heart. I can tell my party's Front Bench, however, that there are no circumstances in which people like me will support top-up fees. At the last election, we had an excellent policy of endowment funds, which perhaps will not be possible next time. Another way must be found, however—I look forward to returning to the matter in the future—instead of seeking to charge students top-up fees, which is absolutely outrageous.

As has been made clear, the public services are central to political debate, but they are the rock on which the Government will founder. The Prime Minister is very fond of saying that he understands the problem and is getting on with the remedy. Nearly six years have passed, however, with precious little effect and precious little reform. The Government are discovering the hard way that top-down reform will simply not work. The truth is that we have had massive tax increases, but we wait in vain for the improvement.

I should have thought that one of the problems that preoccupies this Government more than most is pensions. In 1997, when the Conservative Government left power, pension provision in this country was the envy of Europe, but as the highly respected Pensions Institute said this week:

> "It is certainly the case that within a few short years what was the envy of Europe, namely a good well funded private pensions system sitting on top of an admittedly poor-in-comparison-with-the-rest-of-Europe basic state pension system appears on the verge of possible disintegration".

In the face of these difficulties, the Government appear to be caught like a rabbit in headlights.

David Taylor: The hon. Gentleman refers to the "admittedly poor" state pension system. Can he recall whether the decoupling of the state pension from pay in the economy took place under a Conservative Government? And was it not the Government led by the noble Baroness Thatcher, as she now is?

Mr. Mitchell: I have already pointed out that in 1997, when the Conservative Government left office, we had a pension system that was the envy of the rest of Europe. It is now deteriorating daily, and all that we are promised is a Green Paper. The Opposition have been trying to contribute on this important subject—we have suggested a lifetime savings account—while all the work of the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) is summarily dismissed by the Government. Everyone knows that we must save more and that the debate about compulsion verges on the silly—we must have compulsion. All that we get from the Government, though, is the promise of a Green Paper and the implicit threat that they will do something about abolishing tax relief. The Select Committee is doing its bit: we have set in train some work on what should happen to our pensions system. It is now absolutely clear, however, that what we need is action from the Government, with a clear understanding of the role for employers, employees and the state.

I shall speak briefly on the issue of regional assemblies to which I, and most of my constituents in Sutton Coldfield, are implacably opposed. It is absolutely astonishing that, on top of all the other layers of elected government, we intend to have yet more elected politicians. If the answer to the question is we need to elect more politicians, it must have been a pretty daft question. The Government are a compulsive meddler in our constitution. I accept that it is a minority view, but the unwise reforms to the House of Lords have not been matched with reforms to this place. We all know that there are far too many Members in the House of Commons. We now have more Members than we had when this country governed an empire that stretched around the world. Yet we hear nothing from the Government about the importance of doing something about that.

Mrs. Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Mitchell: No, because I do not have the time.

We have a good and respected Prime Minister leading a rotten Government, who are all hype and no delivery. They have produced an inconsequential Queen's Speech that will do little to address the fundamental and far-reaching problems in Britain today. I hope that the House will reject it in the amendment tonight.

8.51 pm

Ms Dari Taylor (Stockton, South): In welcoming the Queen's Speech, I wish to mention a couple of Bills that I shall support. I shall most definitely support the Bill on hunting with dogs and the Bill that will lead to the creation of regional assemblies. I want a complete ban on hunting and complete regional assemblies.

I am delighted by the inclusion in the Queen's Speech of the Bill on criminal justice and sentencing reform and, for the first time ever, of a Bill to deal with antisocial behaviour. They both place crime at the centre of the scene, and people in my constituency and nationally want there to be a fight on crime. We are delighted that that is one of the Government's central pledges.

I have no doubt that the public have, to some extent, lost faith with the criminal justice system. They have seen it weakened over the years by what they perceive to be inadequate sentencing and soft penalties. The plans to combat antisocial behaviour with tougher measures will win widespread support. I am more than pleased to see that in the framework of the Queen's Speech.

[Ms Dari Taylor]

My constituents have already referred to the fact that in his speech on the Loyal Address my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister mentioned two forms of antisocial behaviour relating to fireworks and airguns. Such activities are second to none in the subjects that are raised in the letters in my postbag. Firework misuse has provoked people in my constituency to say that they feel as though they are under siege from September to January, and particularly in late October and early November. They want effective action to be taken so that access to such products is seriously restricted.

Likewise, no one in my constituency would argue against the banning of—or, at least, the imposition of serious restrictions on—the purchase and use of airguns. I shall argue that licensing with a defined purpose of use should shape the legislative framework that controls the sale of airguns.One death has already occurred in my constituency. Children were having fun, but it was not fun when an airgun was fired and killed a 14-year-old. One death is one too many. A review of the lethal potential of these weapons is long overdue.

My major contribution to this debate on achieving effective laws that will reduce crime and that will revive the spirit of community and social cohesion rests on the belief that the use of illegal hard drugs, particularly heroin, must be controlled. Action must be taken significantly to reduce the number of addicts that live in our communities. I would like to persuade the House that that requires an understanding not just of the numbers of drug-related crimes committed or the numbers of addicts involved. If we are to make an impact, we must understand the root cause of the problem. We need to understand what makes people take drugs in the first place. We know the numbers involved and use them for social policy purposes, but we do not know the people, who are young, vulnerable and poverty stricken. They feel discarded and isolated. It is time that we asked them what is going on in their lives that makes them so controlled by such substances.

It is not that the numbers are not compelling. There are more than 250,000 addicts, which is probably an underestimate. We know that the illegal drugs market has a value of £4.5 billion in this country alone. The problem causes social and economic havoc in many areas. The police in Cleveland estimate that chaotic and problematic users of heroin are finding upwards of £230 a week to spend on buying that drug. To get that money, they steal between £600 and £700 worth of goods every week. We can all imagine how much havoc they wreak on estates in my constituency, and my constituency is not an exception. If we are serious about a Bill to deal with antisocial behaviour and serious in our intent to reduce crime, we should acknowledge that although in relative terms there are only a small number heroin addicts, they commit the majority of crime. We must understand how they destroy our established communities.

I do not wish to criticise in any shape or form the existing excellent drug enforcement strategies. The police have excellent intelligence. I received a report from Cleveland police force that says that it is pursuing a dealer-a-day strategy, which to date has led to the sentencing of 151 dealers in 160 community-based operations. The intelligence is available and enforcement is working. We have drug education and drug action teams and have increased the number of opportunities for drug treatment, but the facts remain stark. The number of addicts is growing year on year. They are getting younger and crime is increasing exponentially with them.

The chief constable of Cleveland said that crime has increased in Cleveland by the astounding figure of 11.9 per cent. He stated:

"this reflects the growth of drug addiction in our community".

If the Bill means what it says and antisocial behaviour is defined, controlled and reduced, we must take on board why young people are compulsively controlled by illegal substances. I ask myself what we are doing wrong. Hon. Members on both sides of the House find the issue compelling. Are we ignoring the evidence before us? Are we underestimating the reasons why young people take drugs?

Research makes it clear that people's propensity to use drugs is due to five major causes. One problem is the accessibility and availability of drugs. We have all heard young people say that dealers are everywhere. They are like crows on addicts shoulders. Young people cannot turn around without being offered two for the price of one or drugs at half price. They are even told that they can pay later. Those young people on drugs are alienated. They are outside the good life. They feel a deep sense of loss. They have low self-esteem, no job and, often, no family. They live and sleep under bridges or wherever. There is an absence of alternatives. No one works with them to say that things could be better and different.

I am passionate about the problem. Those young folks have been excluded somewhere along the line by politicians and social policy, and they think that no one shouts for them. They believe that they have no future and no prospects.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): The hon. Lady and I have discussed the problems of hard drugs before in the Chamber. Does she agree with my hon. Friend the Member for South-West Devon (Mr. Streeter) that we need more facilities for the treatment of hard drug addicts? She has not mentioned that. Does she think that that should be provided by compulsion if people are convicted of hard drug offences?

Ms Taylor: That was an excellent intervention. I am probably rattling through my speech so quickly that the hon. Gentleman did not hear me say that the total number of drug treatments has increased since 1997 by more than a third. I would be wary of using compulsion. The police in Lancashire have a programme whereby, with the health authority, they are embracing young drug addicts. They are saying to them, "You come in and receive treatment and we will do all we can to keep you off drugs. We are not interested in sentencing or compulsion. We know that you have to want to come off the drug." I am told that, to date, of the 36 youngsters given that opportunity, 35 are proving that they can stay off heroin. That is an important statement. I would love to introduce compulsion, but I think that we realise that we can want all we like; the youngsters have to want to come off drugs. I am therefore not convinced on the compulsion argument.

I am convinced of other arguments. We must have a flexible system of support. There is no one size fits all solution. There are individual needs and we must approach the problem by recognising that. Universal acceptance that the state should provide prescriptions of heroin—obviously to a minority group, with great care and to achieve one thing: to cut out the dealers and get young people into a support service—is long overdue.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): Order. The hon. Lady's time is up.

9.1 pm

Mr. Robert Syms (Poole): Like many of my colleagues, I intend to dwell a little on regional government. In common with many MPs, nobody from my constituency has written to me to say that they want a regional tier of government. The Government are making a great mistake by pursuing the policy. People have to feel a loyalty towards an area. They feel a loyalty to their town, village or county—or indeed to being British or being English. If we have to have an unnecessary tier of government, I might be able to persuade my constituents of the benefits of an English Parliament—

Angus Robertson: English MPs have got one already.

Mr. Syms: That is one argument.

People regard being English as very important but they feel no loyalty to the south-west, which is an artificial region that has no separate identity. The Cornish have very different problems from those of us in Dorset. Many of my constituents commute to Southampton, Winchester, Basingstoke and London, and tend to look eastwards rather than westwards, mainly because the road system is so awful that nobody in their right mind would go west of Bournemouth or Poole. The investment has not been made in the south-west.

Mrs. Ellman: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that the case for regional devolution is a case for economic equity together with democratic accountability on the part of the existing unelected regional tier of government?

Mr. Syms: I do not accept that. The Government have been silent on how they would reallocate resources. The issue of Scottish funding and the aspirations of the north of England came up earlier. If the Government are honest, they will publish a paper on inequalities between areas of the UK. When people set out on the journey of regional government, it is perfectly reasonable that they know what financial settlement they would get.

My basic fear is that we will end up with unwanted regional government: a tier of politicians drawing salaries and building new offices. Most of my constituents would rather that that money be spent on social services, education, roads and other important things in their locality. I believe that there is no great appetite for regional government.

The issue of regional boundaries has been raised in the debate. There might be more logic to boundaries in the north of England, but there is certainly not in the south-east, the east or the south-west. The Conservative Government devolved the regional offices to places such as Bristol in order to create jobs there. It was never intended that the offices be a political unit, and I do not believe that they will ever be.

As a schoolboy, I grew up in Bristol. The then Conservative Government created Avon county council, cutting bits off Somerset and Gloucester and changing the status of the city and county of Bristol. There may have been a logic to that—indeed, there may be a logic to the creation of Humberside and other areas—but there was no emotional attachment. Campaigns began immediately, but after 20 or 30 years, the situation has changed. If one does not take into account local ties and concerns, one is storing up difficulties for the future.

I shall focus a little bit on Poole borough council, but before doing so, I should like to agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague) about the problems of flood defence and the various tiers of government that interfere with a solution. An opportunity has been missed in the Queen's Speech to deal with that.

Angus Robertson: The hon. Gentleman will be aware from UK media coverage that my constituency was hit over the weekend by devastating floods. Does he agree that the Government have missed an opportunity as they are not seeking to co-ordinate social security offices, the Inland Revenue and the financial services industry to deal swiftly and effectively with the many hundreds of people in my constituency who are now homeless and the many businesses set to go out of business in the near future?

Mr. Syms: I sympathise with the hon. Gentleman, who has made his point extremely eloquently. The problem will become much bigger. We will have many more floods in future and it would be better to have a clearer, more comprehensive way of dealing with them.

As for the Government's planned local government legislation, we have heard their buzz phrases about freedom and so on, but I am suspicious of their reaction to local government, especially their proposed reform of the grant system. For many years, many of my colleagues and I have campaigned for a fairer grant system for Dorset, which has suffered as a result of the area cost adjustment. It is a great concern that schools in Poole, Bournemouth and out in sticks in Dorset have received £200 less per head than schools up the road in Hampshire and Ringwood. I am disappointed that the Government's reform proposals will make the situation worse. They are taking money from poorly funded authorities to give to better funded authorities, many of which have a political loyalty different from ours in the south of England, which is a pity.

Looking at the various options, it is highly likely that Poole will lose money. It is not an extravagant authority, and may need to impose a heavy council tax rise just to stand still. Changing the grant formula has a great impact not only on local government but on the police. Dorset police authority estimates that it could lose £1.4 million to £4.8 million—a substantial part of an £89 million budget—which could mean the loss of 300 police officers. There is therefore genuine concern about the changes, which could have a great impact.

[Mr. Syms]

I welcome the opportunity for local authorities to get rid of the 25 per cent. council tax discount on second homes if they wish. My main concern is what happens to the money once that decision is made. The Deputy Prime Minister said that most of that money would stay with local authorities—the figure of £65 million was mentioned. However, many empty homes are eligible for a discount, and the £160 million that could be garnered from them may well be recycled back to the Treasury. I hope that the Minister will make it clear that that taxation will not be increased and recycled back to the Government, rather than to people at the sharp end.

Dorset has a serious problem with funding. Social services are under great strain, and the south and south-west have problems providing children's social services, which means that the provision of services for the elderly and the disabled are not what they should be. The proposal in the Queen's Speech to fine social services for bed blocking is not wise as those services are short of money. As the hon. Member for Wyre Forest (Dr. Taylor) said, the fault may not be with social services—it may well be with the NHS itself. I hope that the Government will consider that proposal carefully.

My main concerns are the impact on my constituency of changes to local government and to the local planning system. By and large, our planning system has worked well at district council and county council level. I have concerns, however, about major infrastructure projects—it cannot be wise to spend £80 million on the terminal 5 inquiry at Heathrow when our competitors at Schipol and Charles de Gaulle airport can add two runways and compete with us. Faster progress needs to be made on major projects.

The balance that we strike, with local people being able to have their say through their local authorities, works pretty well. To move towards a regional agenda for our planning, with more decisions perhaps being devolved to planning officers, would be counterproductive. That is a cause of great concern among my constituents. We have a system in Poole whereby, if a matter has to go before a planning committee, it is green-carded. It happens a lot, because people want to see matters debated and dealt with on the floor of their local authority. If we move away from that, we will rue the day.

Earlier, the Government were patting themselves on the back for their achievements in respect of density and brownfield sites, but in Poole that means that many 1930s properties which have rather large gardens are being put under pressure to be pulled down and replaced with multiple housing. That is changing the character of many of our areas, which is a great pity. I would prefer much more power over planning decisions to remain with local people, so that they retain ownership of it. If the Government change the planning laws and get it wrong, they will rue the day.

I have concerns about regional government, the funding changes that the Government are proposing for Poole, and the planning system, which the Government must be very careful about changing.

9.11 pm

Mr. Hilton Dawson (Lancaster and Wyre): This has been an important Queen's Speech, heralding some tremendous reforms and a huge amount of work over the next parliamentary year. I shall concentrate on an element of housing—park homes—and regional government, which are of great significance to the people of Lancaster and Wyre.

Park homes are often described as caravans, and the legislation covering them consists of various Caravan Acts and the Mobile Homes Act 1983. Unfortunately, that Act is full of holes and leaves people—often elderly people—living in rural areas extremely vulnerable to the attentions of rogue landlords. The draft housing Bill provides an opportunity to introduce a new chapter on park homes, which comes about because, over the past four years, the Government have wisely engaged in a complex review process, in partnership with the responsible elements of what should be an excellent industry and representatives of the three national park homes organisations.

I do not have time to deal with all the difficulties posed by park homes, but if we use the opportunities that the draft housing Bill gives us and the knowledge gained from that complex and subtle review process over the past few years, we have a tremendous chance to reform the law and to introduce fit-person criteria for the people who own and run residential parks.

We have the opportunity to introduce sellers packs into transactions that often do not even involve solicitors. We have the opportunity for local authorities to enforce the improvement of standards, better registration and inspection, to ensure that residents are protected and empowered. The important element of affordable housing which is adaptable, light and modern can grow further and become a more important part of housing provision, particularly in rural areas. Residents on parks will be protected and responsible park owners as part of a responsible industry will be allowed to flourish. We are talking about people who, if they are not already seriously depressed by criminal and rogue elements in the park homes industry, now live in fear of some rogue's taking over the running of their park, and of losing any right that they have to live in peace and comfort—often in the last home that they intend to inhabit. Dealing with the problem should be a priority for a Government who I believe are committed to traditional values in a modern setting.

I want to talk about regional assemblies and, in particular, about the Regional Assemblies (Preparations) Bill. I have been amazed at some of the rhetoric I have heard this evening. My constituency has benefited enormously from the influence of the North West development agency. It contains Lancaster university, a world-class university and a centre for high-tech research, management skills and applied sciences. Thanks to investment from the Government, from Europe but also from the development agency, over the next 20 months or so the city will have an opportunity to build a world-class business centre based on high-tech research and the skills provided by the university.

The constituency also contains a large rural area, and the development agency is making huge efforts to help rural regeneration. We are seeing the development of a

"Made in Lancashire" label. We are seeing proposals for investment in and redevelopment of market towns. We are seeing a whole agenda relating to Don Curry's report and his commission on food and farming, the Government's investment in farming, diversification, rural areas, and opportunities for parish councils to develop transport programmes and engage in major planning—huge opportunities, indeed, for rural areas, through education, diversification and co-operation, to reconstruct their economies. It is essential for local people to have a democratic say in the way things operate at regional level.

We need a certain sort of regional government. Various spectres have been unleashed on us tonight, but what we need is regional government that is lean and fit and uses all modern means of communication. We need regional government that is rooted in the history of the areas that it governs. Members have referred to county councils that have existed in the same form since 1974. The historic city of Lancaster, the ancient county town of the old county of Lancashire which stretched from Barrow to Manchester and from Manchester to Liverpool, has real historic resonance. We need a regional assembly that will engage with major stakeholders, and will identify—and enable people to identify—with the whole region. We need regional government that relates to rural areas, urban areas and the vast range of people who live in the north-west. Above all, we need regional government because we need democratic control of the enormous powers that now exist at regional level. Anyone who denies that has given up.

Such a measure will give us the opportunity to reform local government. I do not want the reform to extend just to unitary authorities, although I want to see an end to county councils, which have served their purpose. I want the flexibilities that this Government have introduced through health, social care and education legislation to work to the benefit of people. I want the development of trusts and I want local government to be at the heart of effective partnerships to improve the lives of people in the Lancaster and Wyre constituency.

9.20 pm

Norman Lamb (North Norfolk): In the year and a half or so since I came to this place, the issue of housing has probably made up the biggest part of my postbag. There is a particular problem with second homes in North Norfolk. Some 10 per cent. of housing stock there is second homes. That has a considerable effect, particularly on some of the coastal communities. About 50 per cent. of the core of some villages is made up of second homes. Elsewhere, they make up less of the village, but the impact that they have on the viability of schools, on local transport, on shops and on post offices is considerable.

The 50 per cent. discount on council tax for second homes should never have been part of the council tax regime. The fact that it has remained for so long is a scandal. Since the council tax was introduced, about £10 million to £15 million has been lost to North Norfolk as a result of that discount. A regressive tax that is regarded by many people as unfair seems even worse when they look at what they are getting for their services and see people who predominantly have higher incomes paying only 50 per cent. of the rate because they own a second home. There is massive resentment there.

I welcome the Government's announcement that councils will be able to charge a lower discount on the council tax, but I strongly take the view that it should have been abolished in its entirety, or at least that councils should have had the ability to charge the full council tax. The notes to editors on the Deputy Prime Minister's press release say:

> "The Government has decided that a minimum 10 per cent discount is necessary so that second home owners will have an incentive to tell their local authority that this is a second home."

The rest of us do not get an incentive to comply with our legal liabilities in terms of council tax or any other tax that we have to pay, so why is it that second home owners need that incentive to comply with the law? The Government should have abolished the discount in its entirety, so that more money could be raised for affordable housing and other local services. If it were abolished completely, North Norfolk would get an extra £1.5 million. We will lose £300,000 of that extra sum because of the 10 per cent. minimum discount. That seems a great wasted opportunity.

I welcome the fact that the Government have made it clear that the money will be available locally for local councils to spend as they see fit. That is good news, but my concern is that it comes at the same time as the Government are reviewing the way in which they allocate central Government money to local authorities. The great fear is that local authorities will gain the extra money from the reduced discount in second homes, but then lose out on a reallocation of resources away from rural areas to cities. So we have to watch carefully that that is real extra money. It is desperately needed, particularly for the provision of more affordable homes in North Norfolk.

I add one point on a planning issue. There is a case for at least considering requiring people in these hot spots, in the villages where about 50 per cent. of the houses are second homes, to apply for planning permission to change the use of a property from a permanent home to a second home. Providing some local democratic control over what happens to those villages should at least be considered.

I support the right to buy, which has done considerable good in terms of creating mixed-tenure communities and avoiding the development of ghettoes of entirely owner-occupied, or entirely council-owned, properties. I have a personal concern about the size of the discount, particularly in high-value areas, where individuals can gain an absolute bonanza through, in effect, the transfer to them of public money.

The biggest concern of all relates to the failure over many years to replace lost stock. The Conservative proposal to extend the right to buy to housing associations will simply exacerbate the problem. The Thatcher Government did not countenance it, yet now the Conservatives are proposing it. There are Conservatives up and down the land involved in housing policy who realise the stupidity of this plan, and its likely effect on an already developing crisis, but what have the Government done about the right to buy?

In September, the Deputy Prime Minister said at the Labour party conference that the Government will act. He recognised that, in some areas, the right to buy is denuding local stock, and that there simply are not enough homes for local people. However,

[Norman Lamb]

his statement—it has yet to be backed up by action—resulted in people across the country getting in their applications, so that they can buy their property before it is too late. In other words, it has actually exacerbated the problem. I have checked the situation in Norfolk. In one district, there have been more applications in the seven months of this financial year than in the whole of last year. In another, there were 158 applications last year, but 226 this year. That is fine—

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Wonderful.

Norman Lamb: The Conservative spokesman says "wonderful", but the effect is that an ever-decreasing number of houses are available to rent for people who desperately need them.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: The hon. Gentleman mentions the Conservative right-to-buy policy. He is doubtless aware that all the proceeds from houses purchased from housing associations will be reapplied to build more houses, thus providing more stock for people who want to enter the affordable housing sector. What is important is not the number of houses, but their availability. It is those extra houses that will be afforded as a result of proceeds from the right to buy.

Norman Lamb: That sounds all well and good, but it simply will not be possible to deliver on that. To start with, where will the money come from? It will not be possible to get one for one, quite apart from the impact on the finances of housing associations, which are having to borrow on the money market on the assumption that they will keep those properties for rent.

At the same time as we are losing housing stock to the right to buy, waiting list applications continue to grow. Between 1998 and 2002, the numbers in North Norfolk have more than doubled, and homeless applications are up by nearly 50 per cent. in two years. Overall, there are fewer homes, more people needing homes, and a lower turnover of homes, so the situation continues to get worse.

The planning system is failing to provide sufficient new affordable homes. North Norfolk has a local plan. Only for developments of more than 25 properties is a developer required to provide a mix of affordable homes. That quota was introduced by the inspector, following a public inquiry; the local authority wanted to establish a figure of 12 properties in respect of such developments. We are stuck with that quota because it takes so long to review the local plan. On top of that, developers manipulate the system to delay the building of affordable homes for as long as possible. The planning system must be capable of responding more quickly to changing circumstances. It takes years to review the local plan. We are stuck with a system in a rural area where there are very few developments of 25 properties or more, so very few affordable homes are being built.

The exceptions policy was designed to allow affordable homes to be built outside the normal development envelope of a village. In all the years it has been available in north Norfolk, it has been used only twice. About 15 properties have been built as a result of that policy. It is a bureaucratic system that does not work.

On housing, there has been a real sense of inertia from the Government. So far, they have been unwilling and unable to meet the scale of the crisis that is developing in many communities across the country.

9.31 pm

Mr. Huw Edwards (Monmouth): It is a pleasure to contribute to this debate. I commend my hon. Friend the Member for Stockton, South (Ms Taylor) for her sensitive speech about the drug problem in her constituency. Such problems are echoed in many other constituencies.

The right hon. Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague) mentioned flood management, which is a problem in my constituency. There is a need for a new strategy and perhaps legislation to deal with the alleviation of flood risk. We need more investment and a change in the priorities and the powers given to the Environment Agency rather than leaving local authorities to deal with flood alleviation.

I am pleased that the issue of hunting with dogs is to be resolved. Monmouthshire has a longstanding tradition of hunting, and I am conscious that there is support for hunting within the farming community. Essentially, that support is for the role that hunting plays in helping to control foxes, which are a threat to livestock, and the role of the hunt in removing fallen stock. That support is based on the principle of utility, which my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Environment has introduced into the debate. The representations that I have received from constituents in urban and rural areas have overwhelmingly supported the view that the hunting of foxes and other mammals with dogs for the purpose of sport is morally wrong. I have voted in accordance with that view and will do so again when the new measure is debated.

I acknowledge the need to control foxes, which are a threat to livestock. We also need to provide an alternative method of disposing of fallen stock when hunting has been abolished. I have supported amendments in previous legislation that will call for state support for a livestock disposal service. I urge my right hon. and hon. Friends to consider that when drawing up the forthcoming legislation.

I welcome the proposals to reform the court system. I recently visited Gwent court service in Cwmbran to hear of the proposals to rationalise the court structure. Although that will involve the closure of certain existing courts, a major new court facility in Abergavenny will be developed, combining the civil courts and the magistrates courts. It will be well equipped with new technology and the use of television evidence will be possible.

I welcome the proposed draft housing Bill to improve the process of buying and selling properties. The buying and selling of a home is one of the most stressful events undertaken by most people. Proposals that require the provision of seller's packs should ease the pressure. Other housing measures include the proposal to improve the housing environment in low-demand areas. The licensing of houses in multiple occupation is especially welcome because it aims to improve standards

for people in some of the worst housing conditions. It will require the local authorities and fire services to visit properties to check on their condition. It follows the provisions in the private Member's Bill of my hon. Friend the Member for Brighton, Kemptown (Dr. Turner), which had to be withdrawn at the end of the previous Session. I hope that the Government will consider the home energy provisions that were in that Bill and include them in the new legislation.

I welcome the announcement on antisocial behaviour orders, which will now be available to housing associations. In my constituency I have dealt with a number of cases of antisocial behaviour on housing association estates. I have noticed the frustration of the police and the housing associations at the fact that only the local authority can instigate such orders. It is a welcome announcement that should increase the number of antisocial behaviour orders and address one of the most distressing and unpleasant aspects of life on certain estates.

I welcome the opportunity for people to vote in referendums on regional assemblies in England. Wales and Scotland have shown that there are advantages to democratic devolutions. In Wales, we have seen a renewed confidence about our nation, with better representation for the more deprived areas, as a result of the introduction of the National Assembly for Wales. We have also had a fairer voting system through the additional member system in the Welsh Assembly. We have had better representation of women and the appointment of a Cabinet that has more women than men. What other Parliament or Assembly in a democratic country has that?

Devolution in Wales has also meant Welsh solutions for Welsh problems. We have had a distinct approach—in education more than in other policy areas—with the reintroduction of student maintenance grants for higher education—a measure that I sincerely hope will be followed in England. We have also seen the abolition of SATs in primary schools and the emphasis on true comprehensive schools rather than specialist schools. The Queen's Speech also included the National Health Service (Wales) Bill, which will retain the community health councils that will be replaced in England.

We also have planning policies that will retain the structure—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I have just arrived in the Chair and I hope that the hon. Gentleman is not reading a speech into the record. This is a debating Chamber and it is not for the hon. Gentleman to read a speech.

Mr. Edwards: I accept the point that you make, Mr. Speaker. I was conscious that it was difficult to concentrate, given the amount of noise in the Chamber this evening.

I hope that one important measure will be introduced, as part of the Railways and Transport Safety Bill, to reduce overcrowding on buses. That will also require amendments to the Education Act 1944, which allows the three-for-two rule that contributes to considerable overcrowding on buses taking pupils to school. That is an especial problem in my constituency. Many hon. Members would be disturbed to realise that a 48-seater bus can take an additional 24 passengers sitting as well as another 20 passengers standing, which leads to considerable overcrowding.

We have had an interesting Queen's Speech debate and I am pleased to have contributed to it. I hope that the Government are able to proceed with their policies for improving public services and to continue to improve their economic and social policies as a result.

9.37 pm

Mr. Tim Collins (Westmorland and Lonsdale): There are a couple of measures in the Queen's Speech that we can welcome. We obviously welcome the legislation to set up a rail accident investigatory branch. Indeed, it is hardly surprising that we welcome that legislation, because as long ago as 1999 my hon. Friend the Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin), as shadow transport Minister, called for precisely that measure. While we will study the detail of the Bill, I assure the Secretary of State that the official Opposition will not seek to cause him needless difficulty on it.

My constituency, in common with those of hon. Members on both sides of the House, will undoubtedly benefit from the Government's decision—in response to cross-party lobbying from several hon. Members—to allow local authorities in England to have the same discretion that local authorities in Wales already enjoy to decide for themselves whether to retain the 50 per cent. discount on council tax. However, I would press the Secretary of State to reply to the point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Poole (Mr. Syms) about whether the Government will guarantee not to reduce the grant provided to local authorities availing themselves of that new right, so that they end up better off. He also asked whether the Government's undertaking to allow local authorities to spend the full receipts received from imposing the 50 per cent. or higher rate on second homes also applies to any revenue coming in from the application of that tax to empty homes. If the Secretary of State is not able to respond to those points—even though they were originally made some hours ago by my hon. Friend—I hope that he will ask the Deputy Prime Minister to write to my hon. Friend and me, and other interested Members, on that point.

The Deputy Prime Minister was unable to respond to the point raised by my right hon. Friend the Member for Haltemprice and Howden (David Davis) about whether the Government were as concerned as they should be about the lack of social housing. He said that the reduction in the amount of new social housing built since the Government took office in 1997 has meant that there are 35,000 fewer social houses than there would have been had they maintained the status quo that they inherited. The Deputy Prime Minister could say only that that was a very good point. However, he had no answer, and he did not say what he would do to resolve the problem.

In response to an intervention from my hon. Friend the Member for Tatton (Mr. Osborne), the Deputy Prime Minister made it clear that regional government would end up being what shire county residents have always feared, and that voters in cities would have the right to override the wishes of voters in shire counties. The Government have the nerve to call that a democratic exercise.

[Mr. Tim Collins]

The hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey), the Liberal Democrat spokesman, made it clear that his party wants more regional government. He said that Liberal Democrats for many years had been strong advocates of regional government.

Mr. Don Foster (Bath): Quite right.

Mr. Collins: The hon. Member for Bath (Mr. Foster) says that that is right, but only some Liberal Democrats are in favour of regional government. I assure the hon. Gentleman that, in my constituency, the Liberal Democrats are vociferous opponents of regional government. I do not want to impede the general love-in between the Government and Liberal Democrat Members, but the Conservative-Liberal coalition in Cumbria, which expelled a Labour council, has made it clear that it opposes regional government.

Mr. Martlew: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Collins: Certainly, as the hon. Gentleman may also have views about the Conservative-Liberal coalition in Cumbria.

Mr. Martlew: I made the point that the Liberal Democrats opposed to regional government in Cumbria are the same ones who are in cahoots with the Tories to introduce care charges for elderly people in my constituency. Will the hon. Gentleman comment on that?

Mr. Collins: I am very happy to comment on the fact that the incoming administration, which decided with Liberal Democrat support to expel the Labour party, inherited a massive black hole of £3 million in Cumbria county council's accounts. That problem was made worse by DEFRA's failure to pay up on all the bills incurred during the foot and mouth outbreak.

The hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) asked a very important question, to which I hope the Secretary of State will be able to respond. She asked for clarification of the concordat between DEFRA, the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and the Department of Transport. She wanted to know what it was, what it covered and what it related to. I think that that is a very important matter, and I hope that the Secretary of State will respond.

In a characteristically powerful speech, my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague) pointed out that regional government would shut out the interests of rural areas. He also made it clear that there is strong unhappiness in rural areas about the Government's 20-day livestock restriction rule. Many Conservative Members share that sentiment, and we hope that the Government will reconsider the matter urgently.

I pay genuine tribute to the courage of the right hon. Member for Gateshead, East and Washington, West (Joyce Quin), who was a Minister with the former Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in very difficult times during the foot and mouth crisis. She came to the county of Cumbria before any other MAFF Minister, and answered a number of questions that were put to her. She had a difficult case to make at that time, and she did so with courage. She was equally courageous today, and I may even alarm you, Mr. Speaker, when I note that she said that she thought that the Barnett formula should be reviewed. Not many Scottish Members of Parliament were present, but her remark is worth putting on record.

My right hon. Friend the Member for South-West Norfolk (Mrs. Shephard) was right to address the central issue of the democratic deficit that the Government propose. I hope that I can put the problem in very clear terms. Scotland is a nation and has a Parliament. Wales is a nation and has an Assembly. England is more than a collection of 10 artificial Euro regions. England is a nation too, and has a right to have its voice represented properly.

Mr. Salmond: I am trying to follow the hon. Gentleman's logic. Scotland is a nation and has a Parliament; Wales is a nation and has an Assembly; and England is a great nation so it should have its own Parliament. Is that not the logic?

Mr. Collins: The logic is that we should have the excellent policy that my party has proposed of English votes on English laws in this Parliament. The hon. Gentleman was vociferous in his condemnation of my right hon. Friend the Member for Haltemprice and Howden for daring to criticise the activities of the Scottish Parliament. We would perhaps take the hon. Gentleman's enthusiasm for the Scottish Parliament a little more seriously if, when it came to choosing between there and here, he had not chosen here rather than there.

The hon. Member for Carlisle rightly paid tribute to the value of Border Television, and I join him in that. My hon. Friend the Member for South-West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous) made a serious allegation, to which I hope the Secretary of State will respond. My hon. Friend alleged that his constituents have been told that they will lose Government cash or new transport projects unless they publicly support the Government's actions. I hope that the Secretary of State will investigate that serious allegation, and have done with it if necessary.

We have heard excellent speeches about bureaucracy from hon. Members on both sides of the House. One of the big differences between Labour and Conservative Members is that, like the majority of people in this country, we do not believe that the answer to the problem of bureaucracy is to have more bureaucrats, more politicians, more assemblies, more headquarters buildings and all the rest of it. We think that this country is already over-governed, not under-governed.

Time and again the Government have made promises on these issues but have not been so good at keeping them. The Deputy Prime Minister said that after five years he would have cut road traffic: promise made, promise broken. The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions said that our air is not for sale: promise made, promise broken. In 1999, MAFF set a target and said that it would avoid any major livestock disease outbreak: promise made, promise broken. The Prime Minister said that the Government had no plans to

increase tax: promise made, promise broken. Labour told people in regional and rural communities up and down the land that things could only get better: promise made, promise broken. The Government have failed, failed and failed again. That is why the House should vote with enthusiasm for the Opposition amendment.

9.47 pm

The Secretary of State for Transport (Mr. Alistair Darling): The debate covered a wide range of subjects, but it is incredible that the shadow spokesman on transport made a speech but said barely a word about that subject. This is a man who, when he spoke to his party conference, said that he would shortly make proposals on transport—yet he said not a word about them. That sounds to me like a promise made and a promise broken. He has failed to deliver.

Inevitably, many Members spoke about matters covered by the Deputy Prime Minister and by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. I shall say one or two words about that as a matter of courtesy to those hon. Members. Clearly, there is a lot of feeling about regional and local government. My right hon. Friend the Member for Gateshead, East and Washington, West (Joyce Quin) and my hon. Friends the Members for Southampton, Test (Dr. Whitehead), for Wigan (Mr. Turner), for Sheffield, Attercliffe (Mr. Betts) and for Caerphilly (Mr. David) referred to that subject. I have been in the House for 15 years, and it is surprising to hear Conservative Members' new-found devotion to local government. I spent the first 10 years of my time here listening to them attacking local government time after time, and talking about the abolition of councils, and the people's views did not seem to matter then.

A number of Members spoke about housing. My hon. Friend the Member for Burnley (Mr. Pike) has often raised in the House, and with Ministers, the problems that his constituents face. Today, the Minister for Local Government and the Regions made a written statement on second homes. The answers to many of the questions raised by Opposition Members and others are in that statement; on those that are not, hon. Members will have the opportunity to put their points in the House in the usual way.

The rural economy was another subject that was raised, although strangely not in the opening speech of the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden (David Davis). It was raised by the former leader of the Conservative party, the right hon. Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague)—clearly a man who is enjoying having shaken off the responsibility of being Leader of the Opposition. He made an extremely witty speech. If I too had shaken off my responsibilities, I might agree with one or two things that he said.

As for the rural economy and agriculture—that subject was raised by the hon. Member for South Antrim (David Burnside), but he is not in his place now—this is not just a question of legislation. The Government are doing many things to help people who live in rural areas, and to try to help farmers to deal with very difficult circumstances—not only the aftermath of foot and mouth, but the long-term structural changes in agriculture.

Other matters, too, were raised. My hon. Friend the Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew) mentioned the Communications Bill, and I am sure that there will be many occasions when the House can return to that subject and debate it.

As we approach the first of two Divisions on this Queen's Speech, it is strange that no Conservative Member has mentioned the economy today. Without a strong economy, there is no money to fund the public services—[HON. MEMBERS: "That was on Monday."] The economy is just on Monday, is it? It is on every day of the week, every week of the year. Only an Opposition who lost power because they had lost control of the economy could honestly believe that we only discuss the economy on Mondays.

What is also astonishing is that although in every debate on the Queen's Speech that I have heard for the past 15 years the Opposition have always divided the House on the economy, this year we have had no such Division. Do they agree with us? Have they no difficulties with the economy? Do they agree with our approach to it? It is astonishing that that should be the approach of the Conservative party.

The hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Mr. Collins), who speaks for the Opposition on transport—at least, some of the time—said at the Conservative party conference:

"politics should be about passion, excitement . . . and above all about optimism."

He also said:

"It's time for Conservatives to put some fire in our bellies, to get up off our knees",

but not on the economy—except on Mondays. He continued:

"This country needs, deserves and is crying out for"—

wait for it—

"a strong opposition".

What a limit to the man's ambition. The Conservatives no longer aspire to be the party of government; they aspire to be the party of opposition. Perhaps that is why they discuss the economy only on Mondays and not on any other day of the week.

Without a strong economy, without the money necessary to finance our public services, we will not have the strong public services that most people want. The reason why we can invest in our public services is that we have a strong economy—the lowest inflation and the lowest long-term interest rates for 40 years and the lowest unemployment for 25 years, which shows that it is possible to have low inflation and high employment. We have rising levels of public investment year on year. That is why we have been able to recruit more police, more nurses, more teachers and more school support staff, and to put more money into transport. Those are all possible because of the deliberate decisions that we have taken both in relation to the economy and to invest in public services. And, as the Queen's Speech makes clear, that is all accompanied by measures to modernise and reform our public services—both are absolutely essential.

We have a clear purpose—a clear sense of direction. When we consider the Opposition amendment, on which we shall shortly vote, it is as well to remind ourselves of what was happening 10 years ago

[Mr. Alistair Darling]

this year—15 per cent. interest rates, high unemployment, increasing poverty, increasing inequality, lack of opportunity, and a failing economy. Furthermore, 10 years ago this very year, the Tories were setting out on a monumentally expensive and botched rail privatisation. Unlike today, when the shadow Transport Secretary had precious little to say about transport, a few weeks ago he had something to say about Railtrack. He said at the Conservative party conference

"But nor can we pretend that every aspect of rail privatisation was a success, that Railtrack worked remotely as we had hoped, or that ... our 1990s changes have won popular support."

I suppose that is the nearest we shall get to an apology from the hon. Gentleman: the transformation from the nasty party to the nice party. Then he promised that he would come up with new policies before the year was out. Well, the year has only six or seven weeks to go, and we cannot wait to hear the Conservative policy.

Critical to the continued success of our economy is the need to continue to improve our transport system. More people are in work. We are one of the largest economies in the world. People need and want to travel more and they can afford to do so. That means that we need to put more investment into our public transport, in rail and road, and we also need to ensure that we have an air transport system fit for the future. In the past, the promises of successive Governments were undermined when they either could not or would not find the money. That is why, for example, the west coast main line has not been upgraded since the 1960s or early 1970s. That is why there are problems right across the piece, in the railways and on the roads.

We now have a long-term investment plan over the next 10 years. We are getting to grips with the work that needs to be done. It will take a long time but improvements are beginning to come through.

Mr. Collins: Will the Secretary of State give way?

Mr. Darling: By all means, if the hon. Gentleman wants to ask about transport.

Mr. Collins: As the Secretary of State is saying that the answer to the nation's transport problems is public investment, and as he has just referred to the 10-year transport plan, will he explain to the House why at the end of that 10-year plan—15 years into a Labour Government—*[Interruption.]*—he will be spending substantially less as a proportion of GDP on rail transport—*[Interruption.]*—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The House must settle down.

Mr. Darling: Now I see why the hon. Gentleman said that he wanted to be a strong Opposition—apparently, there are 10 more years of it to come.

As far as I could hear the hon. Gentleman, I think that he was asking whether investment was the only thing. No, it is not. It is necessary to make changes, as we have done: the SRA is providing strategic direction and we are ensuring that Network Rail takes over from the mess left by Railtrack. It is also important to reform the franchising system. All those things are being done.

My hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Mrs. Dunwoody) asked about what Richard Bowker said. I think that he would be the first to agree that he was not saying that the Government had renationalised the railways. Patently, we have not. Richard Bowker's view was that the railway system needed strategic direction—something that it never had under the botched privatisation that the Tories left us. Performance is improving, although there is a long way to go. Much improvement still needs to be made in the railway industry and elsewhere.

I am glad that the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale welcomed the railway and transport safety Bill, which the House will have more time to debate in the future. It will make a big difference, and I hope that it will shorten the time that it takes to ascertain what has happened when anything occurs on the railways. The system has worked well for air and marine accidents, and it is the right way to ensure that we deal satisfactorily with rail safety.

Astonishingly, the hon. Gentleman did not mention roads. However, my point is the same. We need more investment and we need to ensure that we bear down on the problems of congestion. We need to improve road safety and make access easier for people and for goods. The Government are determined to do that, and we shall make further announcements in the not too distant future.

This year the Queen's Speech concentrates on two principal issues—crime and criminal justice, which will be debated tomorrow—but in the five years that the Govt have been in power, we have put in place the basics. We have built a strong economy. We have got more people back into work. We have driven up standards in education. We have devolved power to the regions and nations of this country. We have reformed welfare and health. We are improving the criminal justice. We are tackling the health and social care problems that we were left, and we are reforming public services. From the Opposition tonight, we had no vision, no sense of direction, just an ambition to try to be an Opposition, but the Government are showing a clear lead, and I commend the Queen's Speech to the House.

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 150, Noes 330.

Division No. 1] **[9.59 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Ancram, rh Michael
Arbuthnot, rh James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baldry, Tony
Baron, John *(Billericay)*
Beggs, Roy *(E Antrim)*
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Boswell, Tim
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Cameron, David
Campbell, Gregory *(E Lond'y)*
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clarke, rh Kenneth *(Rushcliffe)*
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James *(Beverley)*
Davies, Quentin *(Grantham & Stamford)*

Davis, rh David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Donaldson, Jeffrey M.
Dorrell, rh Stephen
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland)*
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Duncan Smith, rh Iain
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, rh Eric
Francois, Mark
Gale, Roger *(N Thanet)*
Garnier, hon. Edward
Gibb, Nick *(Bognor Regis)*
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Greenway, John
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, rh John
Hague, rh William
Hammond, Philip
Hancock, Mike
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John *(S Holland)*
Heathcoat-Amory, rh David
Hendry, Charles
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Howard, rh Michael
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, rh Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Key, Robert *(Salisbury)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Knight, rh Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Lait, Mrs Jacqui
Lansley, Andrew
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, rh Oliver
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lidington, David
Lilley, rh Peter
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, rh Andrew
Maclean, rh David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maude, rh Francis
Mawhinney, rh Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Ottaway, Richard
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Pickles, Eric
Randall, John
Redwood, rh John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham & M-Kent)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Ruffley, David
Sayeed, Jonathan
Selous, Andrew
Shephard, rh Mrs Gillian
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Smyth, Rev. Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Spring, Richard
Stanley, rh Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo *(E Devon)*
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Dr. Richard *(Wyre F)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Trend, Michael
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Walter, Robert
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, rh Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Wilshire, David
Winterton, Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Sir Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim *(S Suffolk)*

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mrs. Cheryl Gillan and Mr. Mark Hoban

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atherton, Ms Candy
Atkins, Charlotte
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Barnes, Harry
Barron, rh Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, rh Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Bell, Stuart
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe *(Bootle)*
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, rh Nicholas *(Newcastle E Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caplin, Ivor
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, rh Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann *(Cynon V)*
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Coleman, Iain
Cooper, Yvette
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Cox, Tom *(Tooting)*
Cranston, hon. Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cummings, John
Cunningham, rh Dr. Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Curtis-Thomas, Mrs Claire
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, rh Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, rh John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobson, rh Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Drown, Ms Julia
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Ewing, Annabelle
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul *(Newport W)*
Follett, Barbara
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Foulkes, rh George
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Galloway, George
Gardiner, Barry
George, rh Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, rh Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hamilton, Fabian *(Leeds NE)*
Hanson, David
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Heyes, David
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hood, Jimmy *(Clydesdale)*
Hoon, rh Geoffrey
Hope, Phil *(Corby)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Howells, Dr. Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Hutton, rh John
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Illsley, Eric
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Kaufman, rh Gerald
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford)*
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Lammy, David
Lawrence, Mrs Jackie
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lazarowicz, Mark

Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, rh Mrs Helen
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Love, Andrew
Luke, Iain *(Dundee E)*
Lyons, John *(Strathkelvin)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCafferty, Chris
McCartney, rh Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
MacShane, Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mandelson, rh Peter
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, rh Michael
Meale, Alan *(Mansfield)*
Merron, Gillian
Michael, rh Alun
Milburn, rh Alan
Miller, Andrew
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr. Lewis
Moran, Margaret
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Morris, rh Estelle
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Hara, Edward
O'Neill, Martin
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr. Nick
Perham, Linda
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Pope, Greg *(Hyndburn)*
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, rh John
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, rh Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Raynsford, rh Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Robertson, John *(Glasgow Anniesland)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Coventry NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, Joan
Russell, Ms Christine *(City of Chester)*
Ryan, Joan *(Enfield N)*
Salmond, Alex
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Shaw, Jonathan
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Short, rh Clare
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Southworth, Helen
Spellar, rh John
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E & Lochaber)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, rh Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, Dari *(Stockton S)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Harrow W)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Timms, Stephen
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Vaz, Keith *(Leicester E)*
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Walley, Ms Joan
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Tom *(W Bromwich E)*
Watts, David
Weir, Michael
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wishart, Pete
Woodward, Shaun
Worthington, Tony
Wray, James *(Glasgow Baillieston)*
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Phil Woolas and Dan Norris

Question accordingly negatived.

Main Question again proposed.

It being after Ten o'clock, the debate stood adjourned.

Debate to be resumed tomorrow.

PROCEDURE

Ordered,

That Ms Meg Munn be discharged from the Procedure Committee and Mr Tony McWalter be added.—*[Mr. Ainger.]*

PETITIONS

Natural Health Products

10.15 pm

Dr. Brian Iddon (Bolton, South-East): I present part of a large petition, signed by more than 1 million people, that expresses concerns about the potential effects of two recent European directives on the health foods industry. Tonight, I present more than 350,000 signatures. Many celebrities have signed the petition. More then 20 other Members of the House have presented, or shortly will present, other parts of the petition on behalf of their constituents.

The petition is addressed to the House of Commons on behalf of Consumers for Health Choice and its supporters. It declares:

That consumers in the United Kingdom have for many years maintained good health by choosing to take safe vitamin and mineral supplements and herbal remedies; and fears that the European Food Supplements Directive and the Proposed European Directive on Traditional Herbal Medicinal Products would severely restrict the number and range of such products on general retail sale in the future.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons requires that the Secretary of State for Health does all in his power to protect the rights of UK consumers by ensuring that such European legislation does not unnecessarily and unacceptably restrict the availability of natural health products.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Dog and Cat Fur Products

10.17 pm

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): It is my pleasure to present the petition from my constituent Sandra Edwards of Ardglassie Farmhouse, Rathen, near Fraserburgh, who has helped to collect 2,500 names in an online internet petition for the group Voice 4 Dogs. It covers the same subject as an early-day motion signed by 229 Members, including myself. You will be interested to know, Mr. Speaker, that the issue

featured in the *Sunday Post* in October this year. I know that you take a substantial and keen interest in that paper.

The petition states:

To the House of Commons.

The Petition of Sandra Edwards and supporters of Voice 4 Dogs,

Declares that the import in dog and cat fur products for sale in Britain is unacceptable;

That these sales cause extreme unbearable pain and suffering to animals;

That this trade serves no need in the United Kingdom;

That a voluntary labelling scheme would be ineffective because items can be mislabelled;

That cat and dog furs are bleached and dyed to resemble more expensive furs; that over two million companion animals are killed in a cruel and inhumane way, which involves prolonged suffering, in China each year; that prior to their death, these animals are kept in appalling conditions; that 2,500 people have signed an on-line petition deprecating this trade and that the trade should be banned across Europe.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Government to bring forward legislative proposals to ban the import and export of products made from dog and cat fur as soon as possible and to encourage other EU Member States to do the same.

And the Petitioners remain, etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Free Bus Travel

10.19 pm

Mr. Jim Cunningham (Coventry, South): With your permission, Mr. Speaker, I will take my two petitions separately.

It is probably well known, certainly in the House, that the Coventry British Pensioners and Trade Unions Action Association has campaigned for a number of years for the restoration of the pensions link and the extension of free bus travel.

To the House of Commons,

The petition of the British Pensioners' and Trade Unions Action Association, Coventry Branch

Declares that pensioners benefit from free bus and travel in Kingdom of Eire, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales; that there should be parity for pensioners in England.

The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons in this Parliament enacts legislation to introduce a free national travel pass scheme for pensioners in England.

And the Petitioners remain, etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Pensions

Mr. Cunningham: This petition is from the Coventry branch of the British Pensioners and Trade Unions Action Association. It states:

That the Government has expressed a wish that pensioners should share in the rising national prosperity; that this should involve the linkage of pensions to earnings; that additional pensions should not be in the hands of private insurance companies; that the state should guarantee the security of future pensioners.

The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons enacts legislation to introduce a minimum state retirement pension of one third of average earnings for a single pensioner, and two thirds for a couple, and to restore the link between pension upratings and average earnings.

And the petitioners remain, etc.

To lie upon the Table.

Immigration Control

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Ainger.]*

10.21 pm

Miss Ann Widdecombe (Maidstone and The Weald): I am grateful for the opportunity to raise a case that concerns a young constituent of mine, Madeline Effala. It is very much a tale of two cities—of London and Paris—so I suppose that I should be grateful that at least it involves no guillotine. It is certainly an unfortunate case of somebody being caught between two countries, of responsibility being passed to and fro between those countries, and of my constituent finding herself at the moment with no settled status.

In that context, I ask the Minister—I understand why she is replying to the debate; after all, I chose to call the debate "Immigration Control"—to ensure that her colleagues in the Foreign Office are fully apprised of the contents of this Adjournment debate. I ask her to ask them to consider in turn ensuring that the French Government are aware of the problem. I shall make it clear later why I say that. I tried to make an approach via our embassy in Paris—but of that more later.

Madeline Effala was born in Cameroon on 24 August 1975. When she was 11 years old, her mother went to France to work in the Cameroon embassy. Madeline remained in France, where she was lawfully resident as the child of a diplomat, throughout the rest of her childhood. When she was 22 years old, she came to the United Kingdom—again, perfectly lawfully; her passport was stamped with leave to remain for one year—on a work placement. That was where her problems started.

Madeline's mother and siblings applied for French citizenship and were granted it on the basis of the length of time that they had been in France and of the fact that they were at that moment resident in France. There is no doubt—nobody so far throughout the case has disputed this—that had Madeline been with her mother and siblings and made her own application at that time, she too would now be a French citizen. However, as it happened, she was not in France and could not do so. She was in the UK.

Madeline's visa enabling her to live in France was due to expire in 1997, so she went to the French embassy in London in order to renew it and to ensure that at the end of her work placement in Britain she would be allowed to return to France. The French embassy in London told her that to renew the visa she had to go to France, so she went to France. When she applied in France, she was told that she had to apply in London, so she came back to London. Once Madeline had returned to London, the French embassy refused to accept the form.

By that time, Madeline's right to remain in this country had expired and she was told that she had no right to return to France. She was told that she could not stay here, and that she could not go back to France. Despite the fact that she had resided there for many years perfectly lawfully and that those who had resided with her had been granted French citizenship, and despite the fact that the authorities here knew that she was trying to return to France, she was told that she had no right to remain. After negotiation, it was agreed that she should have a six-month extension to her visa to remain in the United Kingdom, but she was still refused permission in that period to go to France. The authorities refused to accept her form and would not allow her to go to France, and her stay in this country, while lawful, was only temporary. In the end, her visa expired, and although she is known to the authorities and has various outstanding applications, she has had no settled basis for living in this country since 1998, despite the fact that she is working legally and paying national insurance and tax.

In 1999, Miss Effala's solicitors advised her to apply for a two-year permit to remain in this country, but the Home Office turned it down in December 2000. At that point, I became involved and endeavoured to intervene first with the French consulate, arguing that it was unreasonable, given the background to the case, that Miss Effala could not at least enter France and make her application. I also wanted to go out to talk to our embassy in Paris, but it advised me that there was no point, as Miss Effala was not a British citizen, so it could not make representations on her behalf. Once again, Madeline Effala is being passed between two countries, neither of which wants to take any responsibility or is prepared even to entertain making representations. I therefore hope that my comments will be drawn to the attention of the French embassy.

The only course open to Miss Effala is to go back to Cameroon. She has no contacts whatever there since she grew up in France, where her family live. She has a job and is using the money she earns to assist her family. She has been in a relationship for four years with a British citizen. It would be very easy for her to solve the problem by getting married—it is much to her credit that she does not want to do that, but wants to resolve the problem in its own right and settle lawfully either in France or Britain. Bearing in mind the fact that marriage is often abused to overcome immigration problems, that is much to her credit. As a result of my intervention, the Home Office asked for another raft of material, which was provided on 11 October, but no further contact has been made with Miss Effala or, at this stage, with me.

This is a sad and sorry situation. Doubtless both countries can defend their decisions technically, but they defy common sense, humanity and reason. I should have thought that sensible people could find a way through, accepting that but for Miss Effala's bad luck in being this country when the rest of her family got French citizenship and but for her perfectly lawful work placement, she would not be in her present difficulties. Indeed, she might not have got into that problem had she not been advised in 1997 that she had to go to France, then been told by France that she had to come back to London, then been told when she came back to London that the French would not take the form. Where does that leave her?

I appeal to the Minister to speak to her counterparts in the Foreign Office, to look at whether her own officials could apply reason rather than technicalities to this case, and to see whether something can be achieved. The French have now offered, very much at the last minute, to allow Ms Effala to return to France on a tourist visa. If she returns to France on a tourist visa and her application is turned down, she will have no right at all to return to this country and no right to stay in

France. She feels that the tourist visa would put her in an extremely vulnerable position, but at least it would get her back into France.

If proper representations could be made, the case would be cleared up very quickly. It is nonsense. It has taken four years to persuade the French to issue a temporary visa, and my constituent naturally feels extremely vulnerable as a result of all that has gone before. I should be grateful to hear the Minister's comments and observations.

10.31 pm

The Minister for Citizenship and Immigration (Beverley Hughes): I congratulate the right hon. Lady on securing the debate. I understand the reasons why she has done so, because we have had correspondence about the case. Notwithstanding the fact that she has set out some of the background, I think it would be helpful if I could add to that essential background before making some concluding remarks.

As the right hon. Lady said, Ms Effala entered the United Kingdom on 27 May 1997 and at that point was given leave to enter not for a year, but until 27 November that year under the training and work experience scheme. She was then granted further leave to continue her training with Dual Control International Theatre until March 1998. Her employers were advised at that time, however, that the extension under the training and work experience scheme had been granted exceptionally and that no further extension would be approved.

As the right hon. Lady said, before travelling to the UK, Ms Effala had been residing in France with her mother and her siblings. She held a French student visa on arrival in the UK, but that expired in October 1997. Following completion of her work experience, Ms Effala applied to the French embassy for a visa to return to France to attend the college in Aix-en-Provence. Unfortunately, I agree, it seems that once the French authorities realised that she had entered France with a diplomatic passport, she encountered difficulties in obtaining a visa to return there to continue her studies.

Ms Effala was then granted exceptional leave to remain for six months as a visitor, specifically to try and sort out her visa problems with the French embassy. She was unable to resolve her difficulties with the French authorities and applied once again for leave to remain in the United Kingdom while she pursued her application for a French visa. I must say to the right hon. Lady that although I was not Minister at the time, looking back at the case—I have looked at it in some detail—I think that Ms Effala's plight was considered very sympathetically, and again she was granted exceptionally six months further leave to remain, outside the immigration rules, precisely because of the predicament that she was in with the French authorities.

In August 1999 Ms Effala's solicitors applied on her behalf for leave to remain as a working holidaymaker, with a request that the entry clearance requirement exceptionally be waived. Although the Home Office was sympathetic to her plight, 17 months had by then passed since Ms Effala had first approached the Department about her difficulties with the French authorities.

The crucial point is—and while I agree with every other aspect of the right hon. Lady's account, this element was missing from it—that there was no evidence to suggest that Ms Effala had made any progress in resolving her difficulties, or indeed had devoted much effort to doing so. She did not qualify for leave to remain as a working holidaymaker, and she seemed unable to establish clearly how she should return to France, where, as has been said, she has strong family and cultural ties. In view of that, her application to remain as a working holidaymaker was refused on 10 December 1999.

Ms Effala's solicitors and my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Medway (Mr. Marshall-Andrews) submitted further representations on her behalf. The then Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Mrs. Roche), wrote on 1 June 2000 that she would be prepared to review the case if Ms Effala submitted evidence from the French authorities explaining the reasons for their reluctance to grant her a visa to return to France, together with an estimate of when they expected to reach a decision. What was required was just some evidence of Ms Effala's efforts to get the French authorities to take the matter seriously. I am afraid that no evidence was received, and in December 2000 Ms Effala's solicitors were advised that in the absence of the evidence requested, there were no grounds for reversing the refusal decision. They were also advised that Ms Effala had no basis for remaining in the United Kingdom, and that she should arrange to leave immediately.

I understand exactly what the right hon. Lady is saying. It seems, on the face of it, that two countries were passing the buck. But when it comes to Ms Effala's right to remain in the UK—while I am sympathetic in regard to her problem with the French authorities—I hope the right hon. Lady agrees that giving her leeway to try and sort out the issues with the French authorities, which is where the problems lie, should not have meant riding roughshod over immigration rules that apply to others and simply saying "All right, you can stay in the UK". Ms Effala's case has been treated sympathetically in the past, and I do not think it unreasonable for her to have been asked to provide a letter from the French authorities giving the reasons why they were not prepared—or have not been up to now—to issue a visa enabling her to join her family.

Incidentally, I am rather perplexed about the role of Ms Effala's family, all of whom are French citizens. I do not see why they cannot do more to help her secure some recognition and response from the French authorities.

Miss Widdecombe: To be able to get into France at all, and certainly to be able to obtain French citizenship, Ms Effala must have an application accepted. Never mind whether the application is successful; the physical process of getting an application accepted must be carried out by Ms Effala. Members of her family cannot make an application on her behalf.

I have already explained the problem. Ms Effala was tossed about between various countries. She was told "You do it in this country", then "You do it in that country", and then "No, actually, you do in that country"—and then "We will not accept the form". I do not accept that she has not made efforts. Much of the information that has been sought was, in fact, sent to the Home Office in the letter to which I referred. We have not yet received a response. I am not saying that there is anything unusual about that—the matter has been

[Miss Widdecombe]

outstanding since 11 October, not for months on end—but the information has been sent. My constituent told me that she had not understood the extent of the information required.

When two countries are involved, can the embassies not talk to each other? Cannot someone talk to someone else?

Beverley Hughes: I will come to that. I understand that Ms Effala must make an application herself, but if the right hon. Lady examines the very thick case file she will see that there were long periods during which information was requested from Ms Effala and she did not contact Home Office officials.

That is one issue. The other issue is that the difficulties have been with the French authorities. Short of the final point that the right hon. Lady made about whether embassies can speak to one another, what has been done by the Home Office is all that could have been done.

I understand that Ms Effala wrote a letter on 11 October in reply to a request for information. She enclosed copies of her family's French naturalisation certificates. She did not provide any documentation at all concerning her own French visa application, which is what she was specifically asked to provide: evidence that she had made attempts in contacting the French authorities to seek permission to enter the country by visa. That did not arrive in the letter of 11 October, which contained simply photocopies of her family's naturalisation status, which as I say is not of itself evidence of her efforts with regard to the French authorities.

I wrote to the right hon. Lady in August setting out how matters could be taken forward. As I say, Ms Effala has now provided confirmation that her family has French citizenship but she has not provided evidence from the French authorities setting out the reasons why they are not prepared to issue her with a visa to join her family. It has been over four and a half years since she first notified the Home Office of her difficulties in returning to France. During that time the only documentation that she has provided regarding evidence of any visa application is the original application form dated 19 January 1998. She has provided no further documentation to demonstrate that she is pursuing with the French authorities the application, despite repeated requests to do so. I do not say that to heap blame on that young woman but there is another perspective. Information about her efforts has been sought over a long period and has not been forthcoming.

I appreciate that Ms Effala has found herself in a difficult position that is not originally of her making and that by coming to the UK to take up work experience she may have missed an opportunity to gain French citizenship. I am not passing the buck but I hope that the right hon. Lady will accept that in terms of where Ms Effala's future lies, clearly, her difficulties are with the French authorities. That is the key to a resolution of this matter.

Ms Effala says that she accompanied her mother to France in 1986. As has been said, she stayed there for 11 years before she came here. It is to the French authorities that she needs to put the case for compassionate treatment in the light of her strong cultural and family ties.

I accept the point that the right hon. Lady is concerned about: I would not want to contemplate the option of a return to Cameroon, although, theoretically, that is an option. The compassionate aspects have been made clear during the debate. I appreciate that Ms Effala would find it difficult to assimilate the different culture of the Cameroon.

Miss Widdecombe: The reason why I charge in at this point is that I sense that the Minister is beginning to perorate and coming to the end of her speech. The assurance that I have been asking for throughout is this: can someone from the British Government please draw this matter to the attention of the French Government? Even if we cannot make formal representations because Ms Effala is not a British citizen, can we just talk to them?

Beverley Hughes: I was not trying to duck—

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): To perorate.

Beverley Hughes: I was not perorating at all. Nor was I trying to avoid the specific question that the right hon. Lady asked. As she will accept—she has already said that the application has come from Ms Effala—the onus has to be on the particular applicant, but I am willing to try to explore the extent to which the offices of if not my Department, then the Foreign Office, can be brought to bear to try to get the French authorities to respond. While Ms Effala herself, and specifically her representatives, could perhaps have been rather more persistent, I accept that there has been a problem in getting a response from the French authorities. I cannot give any guarantees, but I am certainly willing to explore that possibility with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, and we will see where that gets us.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at fifteen minutes to Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Wednesday 20 November 2002

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

WAYS AND MEANS

SESSIONAL RETURNS

Ordered,

That there be laid before the House Returns for Session 2001–02 of information and statistics relating to—

(1) Business of the House;

(2) Closure of Debate, Proposal of Question and Allocation of Time (including Programme Motions);

(3) Sittings of the House;

(4) Private Bills and Private Business;

(5) Public Bills;

(6) Delegated Legislation and Deregulation and Regulatory Reform Orders;

(7) European Legislation, &c.;

(8) Grand Committees;

(9) Chairmen's Panel; and

(10) Select Committees.—*[The First Deputy Chairman of Ways and Means.]*

Oral Answers to Questions

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

The Deputy Prime Minister was asked—

Decent Homes

1. **Mr. Clive Betts** (Sheffield, Attercliffe): When he will make a statement about the resources necessary to deliver the decent homes standard. [81538]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. Tony McNulty): As promised in the statement to the House on 18 July on sustainable communities, my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister will make a further statement at the turn of the year on how we will allocate the resources identified for the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister in the spending review. This statement will cover resources, including decent homes, as my hon. Friend requires.

Mr. Betts: I am sure that the Minister will be happy to know that tenants in Sheffield are extremely pleased by the doubling of capital expenditure on housing since this Government came to power. They are pleased with the setting of the decent homes target, but they are also pleased that the new Labour administration in Sheffield has withdrawn the stock transfer application previously made by the Liberal Democrats, because council tenants are overwhelmingly against the transfer of ownership of their homes.

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman should put a question.

Mr. Betts: Can the Minister give an assurance that in conducting this review, he will pay particular attention to authorities such as Sheffield? In those areas, tenants do not want to transfer their homes, but they do want the resources to bring them up to a decent standard by 2010.

Mr. McNulty: I congratulate my hon. Friend and the leader of Sheffield council, Councillor Jan Wilson, on taking this issue seriously enough to meet Lord Rooker to discuss further how Sheffield will reach the decent homes standard. I can confirm that we will consider the outcome and policy options of the PSA-plus review into how to achieve the decent homes standard when my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister makes his statement in January. I can further confirm that if Sheffield comes off the reserved list, it will not be disadvantaged in respect of the consideration of future options and the city's achieving the decent homes target.

Mr. Eric Pickles (Brentwood and Ongar): For the Government to meet their decent homes target, there needs to be a strategy for England's largest landlord—Birmingham city council. It is now seven months since tenants turned their backs on stock transfer, and the Government have had plenty of time to consider their position. Birmingham's size and importance has led the Chartered Institute of Housing to warn that stock transfers are in jeopardy. Will the Minister confirm that, in view of Birmingham's importance, its only options—indeed, they are also the only options available to the tenants of Sheffield—are stock transfer, arm's-length, a private finance initiative, or direct management using predictive finance?

Mr. McNulty: I think that we would prefer the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, rather than the hon. Gentleman, to carry out the policy options review of how to achieve the decent homes standard, given his lack of success in Bradford. My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister will meet Ann Power next week to discuss the review, which has yet to report on Birmingham, further. We will take no lessons from a party that left us a £19 billion backlog of council house and social housing repairs.

John Mann (Bassetlaw): Consultation on slum housing with tenants in Warsop, in my constituency, began in 1968, when George Brown was Deputy Prime Minister. I thank the current Deputy Prime Minister and his team for allocating £30 million to Mansfield, Warsop and Bolsover in respect of housing. Will a Minister visit the relevant constituencies in the near future, so that we can promote the rollout of the Government's housing policy?

Mr. McNulty: My hon. Friend will know that in 1997 we released £5 billion of capital receipts specifically for

council housing, and that the amount that we spent on that sector, and on social housing, has since trebled. I had a lovely time in Bolsover on a recent visit, and if I can get to North East Derbyshire again I certainly shall.

Tony Baldry (Banbury): Will the Minister confirm that for council tenants in Cherwell who are concerned about their future, the alternatives are arm's-length management organisation, the private finance initiative, or large-scale voluntary transfer? If I have got that wrong, may I bring representatives of tenants' organisations to see the Minister, so that he can explain what the other options are?

Mr. McNulty: The hon. Gentleman will just have to be patient. As I have said, there will be a statement in January that will contain, among other things, the outcome of the PSA—public service agreement—review that we are carrying out into policy options to achieve the decent homes standard. Then, and only then, if the hon. Gentleman is still not satisfied—and if he can recognise a council tenant—I might see him.

Section 28

3. **Dr. Evan Harris** (Oxford, West and Abingdon): If he plans to repeal the restrictions on the promotion of homosexuality by local authorities. [81540]

The Minister for Local Government and the Regions (Mr. Nick Raynsford): We remain committed to taking forward the statement in our manifesto.

Dr. Harris: Does the Minister accept that section 28 is a stain on our statute book that promotes only intolerance and prevents local councils and schools from tackling prejudice and homophobic bullying? Given the Government's failure to abolish section 28 in the last Parliament, should not they have the courage of their convictions and put its abolition in a Government Bill to send a signal to people outside, the Conservatives and the other place that we are intent on abolishing it as soon as possible?

Mr. Raynsford: We agree with the hon. Gentleman that section 28 does not serve a useful purpose and is offensive to many people. Since the Learning and Skills Act 2000 was introduced, separate measures apply in schools so section 28 does not inhibit proper sex education in schools.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): Does the Minister think that anyone should actively promote homosexuality in schools?

Mr. Raynsford: It is entirely a matter for individuals what they wish to promote, but we do not believe that any public authority should, and there is no provision that allows that. Section 28 has never been used for the purpose to which the hon. Gentleman refers, but it is offensive because it refers to a certain section of the community as having "pretended . . . relationships", a disparaging comment that is deeply offensive to gay and lesbian people.

Regional Government

5. **Mr. Hilton Dawson** (Lancaster and Wyre): When he expects to consult the English regions to determine which ones will be first to hold referendums on regional government. [81542]

The Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. John Prescott): We will be taking soundings in all regions about the Regional Assemblies (Preparations) Bill when it is before Parliament. The purpose of those soundings will be to determine the level of interest in each region in holding a referendum on whether to establish an elected regional assembly.

Mr. Dawson: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for his reply. Does he realise that the city of Lancaster is at the geographical and historic heart of the north-west region, and that the good folk of Lancaster desperately need a directly elected regional assembly to match the superb regeneration and investment in the future industry of the city provided by the Northwest Development Agency?

The Deputy Prime Minister: It was said that nobody was interested in regional issues and that they were not controversial. It will be controversial to suggest that Lancaster should be the centre for a regional assembly; no doubt my hon. Friend has started the debate. I have heard similar arguments for Durham in the north-east, but I shall not enter into that argument. My hon. Friend's question shows that many people in the regions do wish to be considered for an elected regional assembly, and the Bill will give them that opportunity.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Mid-Sussex): Does the Deputy Prime Minister understand that the views of many in the south-east flow contrary to those expressed by the hon. Member for Lancaster and Wyre (Mr. Dawson)? Is the Deputy Prime Minister aware of the "Keep it local" campaign in West Sussex, which commands all-party support? The desire in the area is to keep county council government, which is closest to the people, and not to have a regional assembly.

The Deputy Prime Minister: Polls indicate that in the south-east support for an elected regional assembly is about 49 per cent., which is one of the lowest recorded. We are giving people the chance to make the choice. If the south-east does not want an elected assembly, it will not apply for a referendum. If the referendum does not take place, the south-east can continue with the existing county council structure. It has the choice.

Mr. David Clelland (Tyne Bridge): My right hon. Friend is to be congratulated on the work that he has done on the issue. Is he aware that those of us who will be working hard for a yes vote in the referendum may be at some disadvantage in promoting an assembly whose powers have not yet been established? Will he undertake to publish a draft Bill on the constitution and powers of a regional assembly well in advance of a referendum, so that we can have a more informed debate, with a successful outcome?

The Deputy Prime Minister: My hon. Friend will recognise that our White Paper spelled out exactly what

the functions and powers will be. By next week we will have had an opportunity to debate the referendum Bill, so that the debate can begin.

David Davis (Haltemprice and Howden): If we held a general election in the same way as the referendums are to be held—on different dates in different parts of the country to suit the Government's judgment on the likelihood of victory for their point of view—nobody in his right mind would consider that fair or democratic. Why will the Government not hold all the referendums on one day?

The Deputy Prime Minister: It is a matter for me—[HON. MEMBERS: "Oh!"] Listen to the arguments. It is for me to make a decision about whether there is sufficient interest to hold a referendum in an area. Such decisions could be taken at different times. We shall start the consultation at the same time in all areas, but we may get different views at different times. Decisions as to when we hold referendums will depend on that judgment.

David Davis: The Deputy Prime Minister gave the game away when he tried to sidestep the question by saying that there would be different views at different times. He must realise that his answer makes him, and the Government, sound weak and muddled. I shall ask him again: if he really believes in regional government, why does he not have the courage of his convictions and put the question to the whole of England at the same time?

The Deputy Prime Minister: Having a regional question means that the matter will be decided in each region. If a region does not want to have a referendum—in the exchange on the previous question, the hon. Member for Mid-Sussex (Mr. Soames) made it clear that people in the south-east did not want a vote on the matter—that is a decision for the people who live there. That is fine: they do not have to ask for a referendum. It is a question of choice, something Opposition Members never worry about. The right hon. Gentleman asked us yesterday to trust the electorate. If we are to do that, we must leave the choice and the request to them. I shall listen to people's requests.

Mr. Speaker: Mr. Christopher Chope.

Hon Members: Where is he?

6. **Mr. Christopher Chope** (Christchurch): What discussions he has had with the Confederation of British Industry on regional assemblies. [81543]

The Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. John Prescott): I met the director general of the CBI shortly before the publication of the White Paper "Your Region, Your Choice" in May this year. CBI representatives have also met Ministers and officials at regional events since then. The CBI responded to the White Paper in September.

Mr. Chope *rose—*

Hon. Members: There he is.

Mr. Chope: I am not used to the speed at which questions are now answered by the Government, Mr. Speaker. That was an excellent answer, but will the Deputy Prime Minister accept that British industry considers regional assemblies to be irrelevant to the needs of the economy?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I do not think that this afternoon is the only time when the hon. Gentleman has been asleep. He must have been asleep for months, during which time the CBI and other representatives of industry have made it clear that they are supportive of the proposals. The CBI has been worried about bureaucracy, and its criticism has centred on that. It would prefer not to have bureaucracy in the regions, but it was the previous Administration who established the present bureaucratic regional government structure. We aim to return accountability to the bureaucracy in the regions.

Mr. Peter Pike (Burnley): Is it not a fact that the CBI recognises that the key decisions affecting strategic matters such as transport and communications, which are so crucial for industrial investment in local areas, will, under the Government's proposals, be taken at regional level, and be accountable at that level? Is there not a lot to be gained for business in that? If the CBI examines the proposals in more detail, is not it more likely to support what the Government are trying to achieve?

The Deputy Prime Minister: Leaders of the CBI, the regions and various business groups have made it clear in a number of quotations—I shall not use any of them today—that they want more decisions to be made in the regions, and that they support the policy.

Mr. Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton): When the Deputy Prime Minister listens to the voice of business, will he pay special attention to the voice of business in the region in question? In particular, will he pay attention to business organisations that have polled their members on this matter? The British Chambers of Commerce and the Institute of Chartered Accountants have done so, and found that their members are in favour of the proposals.

The Deputy Prime Minister: Those organisations have indeed made it clear that they are in favour of the proposals. I certainly want to listen to the regional voices; that is a matter of supreme consideration. Those voices will play an important part in the consultations that will be held. We are also taking account of the assemblies in the regions. In many cases—especially in the south-east—they are Tory councils.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham): Might I suggest to the Deputy Prime Minister that a preliminary question should be put on a county-by-county basis before a referendum is held? That question would ask whether the people of a particular county wanted to be in a designated region, or remain outside it. The people of Lincolnshire do not want to form part of an east midlands region.

The Deputy Prime Minister: I would be more impressed with the right hon. and learned Gentleman's question if the previous Administration had given

people a referendum on abolishing their counties before doing so. That is exactly what the Tories did to the Greater London council, too. They did not ask the people of London whether they wanted it to be abolished—they simply abolished it. We are prepared to consider the voice of the regions. That will include the county structures in the consideration, and the boundary commission will judge which local authority structures shall prevail within the regional area.

Planning System

7. **Lawrie Quinn** (Scarborough and Whitby): If he will make a statement on the role of parish and town councils in his planned revisions to the planning system. [81544]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. Tony McNulty): Parish and town councils will continue to have an important role under our proposals for reform of the planning system. Where proposals or policies in a draft local development framework document affect a parish or town, we expect the council to be consulted and its views to be taken into account. Similarly, we shall continue to require local planning authorities to notify town and parish councils of any relevant planning application if requested to do so.

Lawrie Quinn: Does my hon. Friend accept that the type of skills and training that might be needed for parish and town councils to give planning work full consideration might demand extra resources? Will the proposals allow for such training and additional resources to be made available to those authorities?

Mr. McNulty: We are aware that the skills base in the planning profession has been denuded over successive years. We are keen to ensure that parish and town councils remain engaged in local planning and UDP—unitary development plan—processes. Yesterday my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister announced, for the first year, £50 million for the planning development grant, aimed principally at local planning authorities. Clearly, however, if the skills increase in the local planning authorities, their interface and interaction with the parish and town councils will be all the more efficient, and that is what we want to encourage.

Mr. Henry Bellingham (North-West Norfolk): Does the Minister agree that parish councils are a vital part of democracy in counties such as Norfolk, and that parish councillors do tireless work on behalf of the community? Why, then, are the Government undermining them with the new draconian code of conduct and audit requirements? Why do they not simply leave the parish councillors to get on with the job they do so well?

Mr. McNulty: In terms of the planning process, which is the subject of the question, that is precisely what we are doing.

David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire): As a sitting parish councillor, I have often been in receipt of rather odd decisions from the district level. Will the Minister reconsider the possibility of third-party appeals against permissions in certain circumstances?

Mr. McNulty: I am afraid that my hon. Friend will have to wait for the presentation of the planning and compulsory purchase Bill, which was outlined in the Queen's Speech. I suggest that he also read carefully the substantial responses that we received to the planning Green Paper consultations on third-party planning rights.

Equality Commission

8. **Julie Morgan** (Cardiff, North): What representations he has received about the Government's proposal to establish a single equality commission. [81545]

The Minister for Social Exclusion and Deputy Minister for Women (Mrs. Barbara Roche): I have received many representations on the priorities and structure of equality institutions in Great Britain since I announced on 15 May the start of the project looking at these issues. On 23 October I published a consultation paper, and I am planning to make a series of visits beginning next week to hear views at first hand about these matters.

Julie Morgan: I know that my hon. Friend is aware that the Welsh Assembly has a statutory duty to promote equal opportunities as part of the Government of Wales Act 1998. Does she agree that a similar duty for the public sector would be a useful tool for any new commission?

Mrs. Roche: We are certainly looking at the experience of the various remote duties that we have introduced in recent years—it makes sense to learn from them before going further. I am looking forward to the visit that I hope to make to Swansea in January.

Peter Bottomley (Worthing, West): The politically correct aim should be to achieve fairness, and the system needs to be effective. Will the Minister assure the House that she will learn the lessons of Northern Ireland, as some of us think that having a single body there was a bit premature?

Mrs. Roche: I understand the hon. Gentleman's concern about such matters; I know that he has a long-standing interest in them. I have visited the commission in Northern Ireland where experience has been positive. I have also spoken to people with many different views, and we shall certainly learn the lessons.

Linda Perham (Ilford, North): Will the Minister recognise the positive contribution made by— *[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. The House is far too noisy; it is unfair to hon. Members.

Linda Perham: Will the Minister recognise the positive contribution made by the "Equal rights on age"

group towards the single equality commission that she is trying to set up, and the group's campaigning work against age discrimination?

Mrs. Roche: I agree with my hon. Friend. I also pay tribute to the age advisory forum, which I chair and which is made up of members from the voluntary sector, trade unions and employers. It has made a real contribution to the process.

Regional Government

9. **Mr. Andrew Turner** (Isle of Wight): If he will make a statement on his policy on assessing local readiness for referendums on regional elected assemblies. [81546]

The Minister for Local Government and the Regions (Mr. Nick Raynsford): I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister to my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster and Wyre (Mr. Dawson) only moments ago.

Mr. Turner: I thank the Minister for his right hon. Friend's answer. Does the Minister think that my constituents have more in common with Christchurch and Corfe Castle, or with Milton Keynes and Margate? If he is not sure, would he like to come to my constituency and find out?

Mr. Raynsford: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will have a view on that, but ultimately the matter is for his constituents, and if they choose to express their view in a referendum they will be able to do so.

Matthew Green (Ludlow): Does the Minister accept that if we are looking to win referendums, we need to hold them in areas where they are most likely to be won? Why does he accept the boundaries put in place by the Conservatives, instead of setting up a review on which areas want to be in which regions?

Mr. Raynsford: As the hon. Gentleman knows well, boundary issues can be extremely time consuming, and can divert attention from priorities. Our view is that it is better to work with the existing building blocks of existing regions to ensure that progress can be made quickly—which is, I understand, his party's policy.

Telecommunications Masts

10. **Mr. Ben Chapman** (Wirral, South): If he will make a statement on the siting of mobile phone masts. [81547]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. Tony McNulty): Planning controls on telecommunications development are aimed at facilitating the provision of a modern telecommunications network while protecting the environment.

A code of practice encouraging greater consultation between mobile phone operators and local authorities was published on 11 November. The code is a guide to the siting of mobile phone masts produced jointly by representatives of central and local government and the mobile phone industry.

Mr. Chapman: Although the code of best practice is certainly a step in the right direction, does my hon. Friend agree that, rightly or otherwise, there is still considerable public misgiving about the health risks associated with the siting of masts? Does he agree that those perceptions need to be addressed, however misguided they may or may not be, and that operators and communities need to consult more, and more openly, about the siting of masts in future?

Mr. McNulty: I am certainly aware of the concerns expressed by my hon. Friend. He knows that, among other changes, we have strengthened public consultation requirements on proposals for masts 15 m or less high, so that they are the same as those for planning applications. We have also increased the time for an authority to deal with prior-approval applications to 56 days, increased fees to enable authorities to carry out full public consultation, and underlined the fact that school governors must be consulted on all proposals for new masts on or near a school or college. We have no immediate plans to amend the planning arrangements further, but we keep things constantly under review.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): Given the importance of maximising the effectiveness of mobile phone use, and simultaneously, of minimising the inconvenience of mast locations, will the hon. Gentleman tell the House what assessment he has made of the potential effectiveness of cross-network roaming?

Mr. McNulty: The short answer is no, I cannot tell the hon. Gentleman—but I shall be more than happy to write to him. I simply repeat that we have no plans to go beyond the amendments that we have already made to the regulation framework, although the matter is kept constantly under review. We have taken full cognisance of the Stewart report, but as for cross-network roaming, we will have a cup of tea later.

Fire Dispute

11. **Adam Price** (East Carmarthen and Dinefwr): What discussions he had with local authorities in England and Wales prior to the firefighters' strike as regards local emergency contingency plans. [81548]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. Christopher Leslie): The Local Government Association has been closely involved in detailed contingency planning. Guidance has been issued to local authorities in England and Wales regarding the firefighters' strike.

Adam Price: I thank the Minister for his reply. Will he confirm whether the Government have an emergency contingency plan to meet any pay agreement? Will he

comment on reports that any pay deal will be self-financing, which will, of course, involve a cut in level and quality of service to meet any pay demand?

Mr. Leslie: The whole House will accept the fact that we all want the talks that might be under way between the Fire Brigades Union and the employers to succeed. We hope that those talks will be constructive and will lead to the strikes being called off.

PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister was asked—

Engagements

Q1. [80903] **Helen Jackson** (Sheffield, Hillsborough): If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 20 November.

The Prime Minister (Mr. Tony Blair): This morning, I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House, I will have further such meetings later today, and I will be travelling to Prague this afternoon to attend the NATO summit.

Helen Jackson: Now that the weapons inspectors are back in Iraq with a new United Nations Security Council resolution, when my right hon. Friend goes to Prague this afternoon will he ensure that NATO not only discusses its readiness for a negative report back from Mr. Blix, but holds out the possibility of a positive resolution of this frightful crisis that could lead to a peaceful outcome for the whole middle east region?

The Prime Minister: I would certainly agree with my hon. Friend. If at all possible, we should have a peaceful resolution of this issue, but the way to get that is for Saddam Hussein to co-operate fully with the inspectors, who are back in Iraq under UN mandate. That co-operation has not just got to be about access to sites and presidential palaces; it has also got to mean a full and honest declaration on his part of the weapons of mass destruction that he has. If he co-operates fully with the inspection team, mandated by the UN, there will be a peaceful resolution of this dispute, but, in the end, that decision is for him. I hope that he chooses peace rather than conflict.

Mr. Iain Duncan Smith (Chingford and Woodford Green): The whole House will agree that our country must be fully prepared for the awful possibility of a terrorist attack, but while the National Audit Office has found some improvement in the readiness of the national health service to respond to such an event, does the Prime Minister share my concern and that of others that more than a third of ambulance trusts are now not well prepared for chemical, biological or radioactive incidents?

The Prime Minister: We should make it very clear that what Sir John Bourn from the NAO actually said was that there had been immense improvements in the planning and procedures since 11 September to make sure that our emergency services can cope. Of course we carry on working on all the issues that were raised in his report, although I stress to the House—I hope that the House and the country understand this—that there will always be a limit to how far we are able to prepare against a terrorist attack, but in so far as we possibly can, we are prepared.

Mr. Duncan Smith: But Sir John also reported that there are quite significant areas of responsibility where things have got worse. The NAO found that between February and October of this year, the readiness of ambulance trusts had worsened, as had the readiness of major hospitals to deal with radioactive incidents. Why does the Prime Minister think that that has happened?

The Prime Minister: What Sir John actually said—I quote him specifically—was:

"Since the events of September 11th, the NHS has made a concerted effort to improve its planning and"

procedures

"for dealing with major incidents and in many respects has succeeded".

It is true that he goes on to say that there are areas where it has got to do more. Those are precisely the areas that we are working on, but it is irresponsible and wrong for the right hon. Gentleman to suggest that the NHS has not made every effort to do what it can.

Mr. Duncan Smith: The report said, quite categorically, that readiness in certain areas had actually got worse since the NAO first reported on them, but when it comes to terrorism, surely it is not just the NHS that needs proper co-ordination. In the past week, a press release on terrorism has been issued by the Home Office and then retracted; we have heard reports from security sources of planned attacks on the tube that have since had to be denied. Given the need to avoid confusion, on which we all agree, does the right hon. Gentleman agree with the proposal of the Select Committee on Defence, supported by ourselves, for a dedicated Cabinet Minister with responsibility for those matters?

The Prime Minister: First, the reports about the potential for an attack on the underground were not from the security services; they were reports in newspapers. I hope that, throughout the subsequent period, we keep in mind that distinction. Secondly, I do not believe that we need a dedicated Cabinet Minister in charge of such matters. A perfectly good operation exists: the Home Secretary chairs the relevant Cabinet Committees, and a system is in place headed by Sir David Omand, who is in charge of security and intelligence co-ordination. That works extremely well, and our security services and our police do a superb job of protecting this country. I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will agree that, in these days, when virtually every major country around the world is receiving intelligence about potential threats, it is extremely important not only to make every preparation but to make sure that we do not unnecessarily alarm people.

Mr. Duncan Smith: This is an issue of co-ordination, and the Defence Committee said about the Home Secretary:

"We are not convinced that the Home Secretary, given his many other responsibilities, is best placed to deliver it".

The Committee Chairman also said that he felt that there was a "lack of grip" overall. The Prime Minister should be aware that that lack of grip is particularly worrying as we head towards the possibility of an eight-day fire strike. Will he therefore confirm that, as matters stand, during the strike, it will be left to individual firefighters to decide who should respond to any terrorist emergency? Does he agree that that is utterly unacceptable in the current circumstances?

The Prime Minister: I reject entirely the right hon. Gentleman's suggestion that there is not a proper grip on security and intelligence co-ordination. As I said a moment or two ago, our security services do an excellent job on behalf of this country. Incidentally, this country, as we all know, has long experience of dealing with terrorism. I do not believe that our system offers a useful analogy with the system in the United States, which he suggests that we adopt. That is a completely different, federal system, with far-flung states that have their own bureaucracies and administrations. That is a completely different situation from our own. I believe that our security services and the Home Secretary have done absolutely everything that they can. In respect of the firefighters' strike, of course, it must be for us to determine whether there is a major emergency.

Mr. Duncan Smith: If the Prime Minister—*[Interruption.]* Oh yes. If the Prime Minister, as he has said, leaves that to the Government to determine, and there is no agreement with the firefighters, will he make it absolutely clear today that he will use the emergency powers at his disposal to ensure public safety in the event of a terrorist attack occurring during the strike?

The Prime Minister: As we have said on many occasions, we will use whatever powers we need. We have to make sure that the public are properly protected. We have had a 48-hour strike already, however, and during that strike, as a result of the preparations that were made, the military did a superb job of protecting the people of this country. In the event of a major emergency, of course, there is a procedure in place, which will be maintained whether or not there is a firefighters' strike.

Mr. Duncan Smith: The Prime Minister has not answered the question. People want to know why the Government will now leave it to the firefighters to decide whether there is an emergency. The public want to know whether their safety will be put first. The problem is that, throughout this period, we have had different answers from different Ministers on whether more money is available for the strikers, and on the number of fire engines available for training. Only last week, Lord Falconer said that troops would cross the picket lines. Today, that was completely denied by the Chief of the Defence Staff, who said that they will not cross picket lines. Does not the Prime Minister understand that public safety must be guaranteed—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. There is no point in shouting at the Leader of the Opposition. I ask hon. Members to show courtesy to the right hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Duncan Smith: The Government must end the confusion and make sure that, if they say that they will stick to a course, they stick to it and not argue about it in public.

The Prime Minister: I think there is rather more confusion in the mind of the right hon. Gentleman than anywhere else. First, let me again make it clear, as the Government have said throughout, that, outside the existing formula, there can be greater pay for firefighters only if it is paid for by the modernisation proposals that are set out in the Bain review. That is very clear. Secondly, we take all the preparations necessary under the advice of the military and, incidentally, they do not involve just the green goddesses, but the 400 specialist teams, the rescue equipment, breathing apparatus, fire-cutting equipment and so on. They will remain in place.

I assure the right hon. Gentleman that we will carry on doing absolutely everything that is necessary to make sure that the public are protected while the dispute, which we believe to be unreasonable and wrong, continues. There is nothing that will get in the way of that to do with politics, ideology or anything else. However, I have to say to him that I do not believe that it helps anybody in these circumstances if the Opposition, rather than trying to help the situation, aggravate it by an opportunism that is as pathetic as it is transparent.

Mr. Chris Pond (Gravesham): A couple of weeks ago, I was able to deliver a couple of hundred letters to No. 10 Downing street about the proposal to build an airport twice the size of Heathrow on marshland at Cliffe next to my constituency. I have here another 800 letters for my right hon. Friend and they express the concern and anxiety of people in that area about the impact on their quality of life and about the affect that the proposal would have on national prosperity and through the impact on—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The Prime Minister can answer the hon. Gentleman's point.

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is entirely right to raise on behalf of his constituents an issue that I know will cause a lot of concern to them. He will know that we have in place a procedure whereby we have to put out all the various options for consultation. We will then take into account all the responses to that, including not just the 200 letters that he delivered to us but what I can see are the more than 200 that he has with him. Obviously, these are extremely difficult issues. He and his constituents will understand that it is right that we put forward all the options, but it is at a later time that we decide which option we prefer.

Mr. Charles Kennedy (Ross, Skye and Inverness, West): Earlier today the Defence Secretary confirmed that the United States Administration had now made a

formal request to the Government for the deployment of British forces if military action against Iraq became inevitable. At the same time at the same press briefing, the Chief of the Defence Staff expressed his considerable concerns about what he described in this context as the present military effectiveness of British armed forces in this respect. How much will the Prime Minister weigh that judgment in mind?

The Prime Minister: The Chief of the Defence Staff did not say that. What he pointed out perfectly obviously is that, if one has 19,000 troops engaged in activities to do with the fire dispute, they cannot be engaged in other activities. However, he said that we would have the full operational capability for any requirement that might be made of us. It is true that we have received a request from the United States—I believe that it has made the same request to 60 different countries—but it has always been the position of the UK Government that, if there were to be a breach of the United Nations resolution and we were to enter into military conflict in circumstances that we thought were justified, we would be part of any coalition to make sure that the will of the UN was upheld. The position has not changed on that.

Mr. Kennedy: On that point, and given that one assumes that the Chief of the Defence Staff chooses his words with care, is the Prime Minister entirely satisfied that, if he has to take that decision about the deployment of British troops, they are up to an adequate level of military preparedness?

The Prime Minister: Yes. Since the right hon. Gentleman said that the Chief of the Defence Staff chose his words carefully, I should perhaps quote those words. He said:

"We will maintain a capability to respond to any future requirements falling on the Armed Forces."

That is what he said. It seems to be very plain, and I agree with it.

Alan Simpson (Nottingham, South): May I thank the Prime Minister for not responding to the taunts of the Leader of the Opposition, who seems more interested in causing a fire than in putting one out?

Will the Prime Minister join me in welcoming the modernisation proposals put forward today by the Fire Brigades Union? They are based on the same proposals that we intended to include in a White Paper on modernisation and are designed to guarantee £3 billion of internal savings in the running of the fire service. Will he also join me in urging the employers to consider those proposals? They should realise that the FBU has thrown them a lifeline that will allow them to produce a sensible pay settlement and avoid an entirely unwelcome strike, which they may otherwise take us into. Will he urge them to accept those proposals?

The Prime Minister: I do not think that I can go along with 100 per cent. of my hon. Friend's comments. However, we consider carefully any proposals made by the Fire Brigades Union, but they have to be seen in the context of the Bain report. Although much has been written about the report, I recommend that people read it because they will see that he recommends various modernisation proposals. For example, he suggests ending the ban on mixed crewing, which prevents part-time and full-time firefighters crewing the same appliances; ensuring that we use joint control rooms with other emergency services; implementing measures to tackle sickness and ill health in the fire service—70 per cent. of its members retire early on ill health grounds—and ensuring that firefighters are allowed to train as paramedics and carry resuscitation equipment.

If people study the report, they will see that those are not wildly unreasonable suggestions. Of course we will consider whatever the Fire Brigades Union does, but I hope that it, too, looks properly at the Bain proposals. It should realise that teachers, police, doctors, nurses and others also do a valuable job of work in our community and that we cannot countenance a pay claim of the size that the union suggests.

Northern Ireland

Q2. [80904] **Lady Hermon** (North Down): What plans he has to visit Northern Ireland.

The Prime Minister: I have no immediate plans to do so. I visited Northern Ireland just recently, as the hon. Lady knows.

Lady Hermon: I thank the Prime Minister for that response. I also thank him for his frequent visits to Northern Ireland and still hope that he will come to North Down, the centre of the universe.

Given the Government's renewed commitment, which I welcome, to the full implementation of the Belfast agreement, will the Prime Minister confirm that the principle of equality of opportunity, which is guaranteed and enshrined in the agreement, will be extended to police recruits and police support staff, instead of recruiting by religious discrimination? Surely, as the Prime Minister himself said in Belfast recently—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Lady is doing well.

The Prime Minister: We hope that in terms of the regulars, the proportion of officers in the police service will be 40 per cent. Catholic over the next 10 years, and we are recruiting on a 50:50 basis. In relation to support staff, I am advised that we have had four competitions on a 50:50 basis, but it is still too early to see the results of that. *[Interruption.]* Well, may I say to Opposition Members that the whole purpose of recruiting on a 50:50 basis is to end the discrimination? We recognise that there are still certain difficulties with recruiting, but we want to maintain the position of getting to a balanced police service, which is why it is important to keep the 50:50 recruitment.

I thank the hon. Lady for her kind invitation to North Down. I do not always receive invitations to visit every constituency in Northern Ireland, so that is particularly welcome.

Mr. Eddie McGrady (South Down): Does the Prime Minister intend to attend party talks in Northern Ireland, in partnership with the Irish Government and in association with the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, to expedite the resolution of our political

vacuum and, in particular, to ensure that the Good Friday agreement is fulfilled in its totality? We must ensure that what is taking place now is a review of the agreement rather than a renegotiation of it.

The Prime Minister: As I always point out to anyone who asks for a renegotiation of the agreement, we would ultimately end up negotiating with the same parties over the same issues. I want the Good Friday agreement to be implemented. I think the vast majority of people in Northern Ireland also want that. Their worry at the moment is whether they can be sure that it will be implemented: will all parties commit themselves to exclusively peaceful and democratic means and will a power-sharing Executive in Northern Ireland stand the test of time?

I hope my hon. Friend forgives me if I do not give a commitment about any particular meeting, but of course we will remain fully engaged and committed. I believe that the Good Friday agreement—the Belfast agreement—provides the only way forward for people in Northern Ireland. One possible hope for the future is that this recent political crisis has not intensified the security crisis. Most people understand that in the end they will have to come back and debate these issues and find a way through, so that all aspects of the Good Friday agreement are completed for the future of the people of Northern Ireland.

Engagements

Q3. [80905] **Angus Robertson** (Moray): Large parts of Moray were devastated over the weekend by the third flood in five years, causing serious damage in Elgin, Rothes and Forres. This is a double whammy for the constituency as coastal communities brace themselves for massive threatened cuts in the fishing industry which, like the floods, will cause untold misery and job losses. Will the Prime Minister outline what the Westminster Government will do to assist, how long that will take and whether he will visit Moray as a matter of urgency to see the devastation at first hand?

The Prime Minister: I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving me notice of his question. I pay tribute to everyone who helped to evacuate people from their homes and to contain the flood waters; they did a wonderful job.

There are three things that I would say to the hon. Gentleman. First, Moray council will apply to the Scottish Executive for assistance under the Bellwin scheme, and obviously that is a devolved matter. Secondly, people who have no other safety net can apply to the Department for Work and Pensions for immediate emergency assistance through the social fund. Thirdly, Her Majesty's Customs will work with businesses on VAT payments and other problems that they may have to ease their difficulties in a time of great crisis. If the hon. Gentleman wants to make other suggestions to me, I will be happy to hear them and to pass them on to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland or the Scottish Executive.

Kali Mountford (Colne Valley): The Queen's Speech, rightly, takes very seriously the question of tackling crime. Will my right hon. Friend give an assurance that domestic violence and crimes associated with it remain a high priority for the Government? Will he assure us that when victims report crime, the police, courts, local authorities, and housing, social services and health departments will give them the response that they need and deserve and they will get a chance to rebuild their lives?

The Prime Minister: I can assure my hon. Friend that domestic violence issues remain at the top of the criminal justice agenda. We shall shortly publish a consultation paper on domestic violence, which is a huge issue in this country. It is reported today more than ever before. Domestic violence underlines the importance of supporting the Government's proposals for criminal justice reform because if we make changes to the way in which evidence is given and to the way in which previous convictions are put before the court, that will assist us greatly in bringing to justice those who are responsible for this ghastly crime.

Q4. [80906] **Mrs. Patsy Calton** (Cheadle): Will the Prime Minister give a commitment that a redrafted mental health Bill will place a requirement on health and social services to honour advance directives so that patients' wishes, expressed when they are well, are as far as possible carried out when they become ill?

The Prime Minister: I am sure that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health will have heard what the hon. Lady said. We are considering the responses to consultation and we published a draft Bill, and we shall have to return to this subject. The difficulty, I emphasise to the House, is that while, of course, we must pay proper attention to the rights of people who are mentally ill, we must also make sure—this is why there has been such pressure to change the law—that the public are properly protected from people who may be mentally ill and a severe danger to the public even though they have not been convicted of a specific criminal offence.

Q5. [80907] **Hugh Bayley** (City of York): May I draw the Prime Minister's attention to the success of a crime-fighting partnership in York called Operation Ratcatcher, which has been extremely successful in increasing the number of arrests for drug offences and street crimes such as robbery? What additional help will the national policing plan provide for police forces in major towns in rural counties such as York to combat crime and disorder?

The Prime Minister: Quite apart from the additional police support that will be provided, the key thing is to focus attention on the issues that my hon. Friend talked about—issues to do with drugs and violence on our streets. Once again, we see the importance of the criminal justice reforms, for example, measures on antisocial behaviour and particularly new measures on drugs where we are providing more treatment and making sure that persistent offenders on drugs are not simply bailed back out on the street again. Those proposals will make a significant difference. As I discovered when talking to basic command unit police commanders yesterday, there is broad support for the

Government's criminal justice proposals, and I very much hope that Members on both sides of the House will give them a fair and good hearing.

Q6. [80908] **Mr. Alistair Carmichael** (Orkney and Shetland): If Commissioner Fischler's proposals to cut white fish quotas for next year by 80 per cent. are implemented, it will be the death of many fishing communities, including Shetland in my constituency, where 30 per cent. of the local economy is dependent on the fishing industry. What assurance can the Prime Minister give my constituents that the delegation that he will send to the Fisheries Council next month in Brussels will not allow that to happen?

The Prime Minister: We will argue for the maximum protection of the fishing industry consistent with what is a real and serious problem. I know that a delegation from Scottish fisheries is seeing the Under-Secretary of State for Scotland at the Scotland Office today. We all know that the problem of fishing stocks cannot be ignored or wished away. Two things must happen. First, we will work with the UK fishing industry—we have already provided some £130 million in the past few years—to change the industry and restructure it as necessary.

Secondly, we will do our level best to protect the stocks necessary for the fishermen to earn a living, but the hon. Gentleman will accept that it is only honest to acknowledge that there is a serious problem with fishing stocks, and that we have to cope with it through a combination of getting the best deal out of Europe to allow fishermen to carry on fishing that is consistent with protecting our fishing stocks and providing Government support, advice and assistance in whatever restructuring is necessary. As I said at Prime Minister's questions a couple of weeks ago, it is simply not possible to pretend that there will be no change given the seriousness of the situation.

Q7. [80909] **Tony Wright** (Cannock Chase): We now have universities that offer degree courses in aromatherapy, rugby studies and golf course management, for which I understand the entry requirement is a handicap of no more than 4.4, but at the same time the country is in desperate need of skilled trades people. Does that not suggest that we need a proper review of what we want our higher education system to be and the way in which we will pay for it?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is absolutely right—it is for precisely that reason that we have a review under way. I am glad that he recognises that the status quo is not an option. What we pay our university lecturers and the backlog of repairs and work necessary to maintain the university infrastructure means that the status quo is not an option. We have got to find the right way through, and we will.

Q8. [80910] **Michael Fabricant** (Lichfield): The Prime Minister rather uncharacteristically brushed aside the question from his right hon. Friend the leader of the Liberal Democrats, so could I ask him as Prime Minister and Head of Government what specific request has been made for what troops by President Bush, if we have to invade Iraq?

The Prime Minister: As I said to the person the hon. Gentleman gently called my right hon. Friend, we have received the same general request as everyone else. We have not received a specific request in relation to specific troop requirements. As the hon. Gentelman knows, however, the Government's position is that if there is a breach by Saddam Hussein and military action follows, he must be disarmed of those weapons of mass destruction. We are simply not at the stage yet of specific requests for specific numbers of troops to be used in a specific way—that will come at a later time.

Q9. [80911] **Mr. Tony McWalter** (Hemel Hempstead): When my right hon. Friend exercises his considerable powers of appointment, which many believe are quasi-mediaeval both in their extent and the manner in which he is required to exercise them, what emphasis does he give or what weight does he attach to a demonstrated capacity for displaying independence of mind?

The Prime Minister: I have precisely the same attachment to independence of mind as any Prime Minister before me. I have not yet had an opportunity to demonstrate that to my hon. Friend, but he never knows.

Q10. [80912] **Norman Lamb** (North Norfolk): Is the Prime Minister aware that the Government's flagship private finance initiative hospital in Norwich is heading for a £3 million deficit this year, and that the hospital is so overcrowded that more than 10 operations a week have to be cancelled? What are the Government doing to address the beds shortfall in Norfolk?

The Prime Minister: I am not sure that the figures which the hon. Gentleman quotes are correct.

Mr. Richard Bacon (South Norfolk): Yes, they are.

The Prime Minister: There we are—I have some objective advice from the Conservative Back Benches. I have visited the Norwich PFI hospital myself, and I can tell the hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb) that the facilities there are superb, the staff do an excellent job, and we have increased the funding for that hospital and for the health authority way beyond anything that the Liberal Democrats ever asked of us.

Points of Order

3.31 pm

Mr. Steve Webb (Northavon): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. In March this year I tabled a written question to the Department for Work and Pensions asking for information on the position of disabled people in hospital. The written answer stated that the information was not available. As you know, I then used my rights under the Data Protection Act 1998 to obtain internal Department for Work and Pensions paperwork, which demonstrated that the Department did have the information—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Will hon. Members leave the Chamber quietly? There is a point of order in progress.

Mr. Webb: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. As you know, subsequent to that, when the information became known to the press I received an apology from the Department, but not before. Were that an administrative oversight, I would let the matter rest, but I believe that there was a deliberate decision by the Department to withhold information from Parliament and thereby to mislead Parliament. I should be most grateful for your guidance.

Mr. Speaker: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving me notice of his point of order. I understand that the Minister has apologised to him, as well as apologising through me to the House. As I have frequently made clear to the House, and as is also stated in the ministerial code, Ministers are expected to be as open as possible with the House. It appears that on this occasion the standards expected of Ministers and Departments have not been met. I look to the Department to review its handling of parliamentary questions to ensure that that does not happen again. The hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) may also wish to draw the matter to the attention of the Chairman of the Public Administration Committee, which reviews aspects of ministerial answers to parliamentary questions.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): On a point of order, on a separate but related matter, Mr. Speaker. You will be aware that on the Order Paper today there were eight of those new-fangled written ministerial statements. I have just checked in the Library, and you will no doubt be as distressed as I am to learn that as at 2.30 pm, only five of those previously notified statements were in the Library and available to Members. Is there anything that you can do to protect the House against such patent abuse, whereby Ministers appear to know the day before—in other words, in time to put it on the Order Paper—that they have a ministerial statement to make, yet fail to make it available to the House even as late as 2.30 pm? Surely that is not what was intended by the new device, and something should be done about it, and quickly.

Mr. Speaker: On the day of Prime Minister's questions, other things cause me distress, but I can tell the right hon. Gentleman that those statements have only to be printed in *Hansard*. That is the rule. Perhaps he should check with the Leader of the House and with the Clerk of the House.

Mr. Nicholas Soames (Mid-Sussex): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. On Monday, you made an important and dignified statement about the conduct of questions and answers in this House of Commons. It is quite plain from this afternoon's performance that no copy of that statement was given to the Prime Minister. Would you be good enough to assure the House that you will ensure that the Prime Minister sees a copy of that statement and confines his answers to the essentials? Secondly, will you do what you can to discourage some of our less confident colleagues who feel it essential to use props during questions?

Mr. Speaker: The facts speak for themselves—we reached Question 9 on the Order Paper. [HON. MEMBERS: "Ten."] My apologies; we got to Question 10, although we got to Question 9 by 3.30. I think that Ministers are taking the hint since I made my statement. If they do not, they will be cut short.

Mr. Christopher Chope (Christchurch): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. Is it in order for the Government to alter the terms of questions on the Order Paper? Yesterday, I received a holding reply from the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry to a question that I had asked her about the number of car parking spaces available to employees of her Department. When I received that reply, the following words were added to my question: "Round Robin—Guidance Expected". Is it in order for the Government to change the terms of questions?

Mr. Speaker: Those matters have absolutely nothing to do with me.

Orders of the Day

Debate on the Address

[SIXTH DAY]

Order read for resuming adjourned debate on Question [13 November],

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, as follows:

Most Gracious Sovereign,

We, Your Majesty's dutiful and loyal subjects, the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, in Parliament assembled, beg leave to offer our humble thanks to Your Majesty for the Gracious Speech which Your Majesty has addressed to both Houses of Parliament.—*[Mr. Foulkes.]*

Question again proposed.

Home Affairs

Mr. Speaker: Before we start the debate, I should inform the House that I have selected for debate the amendment in the name of the Leader of the Opposition. Standing Order No. 33 provides that on the last day of the debate on the motion for an Address to Her Majesty, the House may also vote on a second amendment selected by the Speaker. I have selected the amendment in the name of the leader of the Liberal Democratic party for that purpose. The vote on that amendment will take place at the end of the debate, after the amendment in the name of the Leader of the Opposition has been disposed of.

3.38 pm

Mr. Oliver Letwin (West Dorset): I beg to move, as an amendment to the Address, at the end of the Question to add:

'Welcome measures in the Gracious Speech to improve criminal justice, despite the failure of the Government's previous 12 such Acts to deliver improvement; further welcome measures to reform the excessively bureaucratic legislation previously introduced to curb anti-social behaviour, and other measures, proposed by Her Majesty's Official Opposition, to protect the public from sex offenders; but deplore proposals within the European Arrest Warrant that could lead to the arrest of people in Britain for actions which are not crimes in Britain, or to the deportation of British people for trial in judicial systems where there is no presumption of innocence; will study with concern any proposals for the restriction of the "double jeopardy" rule, or the introduction of past convictions into court proceedings; and regret the failure of the Government to address the central issues of crime today, such as the lack of true neighbourhood policing, the falling rates of detection and the lack of a coherent strategy to lift young people off the conveyor belt to crime.'.

As I have said on previous occasions both in the House and outside, the Home Secretary bears a heavy responsibility. The integrity and energy with which he discharges that responsibility continue to evoke admiration in all parts of the House. As we enter what may be dangerous weeks and months due to the operations of unseen and malign forces, he and the officials and agencies that work with him will have the unswerving support of the Opposition in their efforts to protect the British public from those threats. I hope that we may soon be given a full statement on the nation's preparedness.

I am hopeful about the Government's proposals on child protection and sexual offences. I believe that there is much common ground, as we said yesterday, and I hope that we shall arrive at a consensus on many of the proposals that we have made to tighten the law protecting children. I feel confident also that the House as a whole will agree on many measures in the criminal justice Bill. It is a matter of consensus that we require new codes on criminal offences, sentencing and court procedures, and that we need a new working relationship between the police, the Crown Prosecution Service and the courts.

It is a matter of consensus that we need more thorough protection and support for victims and witnesses. We need to explore means of preventing the ludicrous position whereby people are often more frightened to be witnesses or victims in court than to be accused in court. Witness intimidation should attract the stiffest penalties, and using violence to pervert the cause of justice should be viewed as striking at the heart of our legal system's integrity.

However, there is a danger that the Government will present measures that fail to tackle the most genuine problems, such as lack of neighbourhood policing and the conveyor belt to crime that leads our young people to hard drugs and persistent offending. There is a danger that the Government will conceal that failing by introducing measures of questionable practical utility in the fight against crime that nevertheless score headlines because of their illiberalism or lack of sufficient attention to fundamental liberties.

We shall carefully consider the Government's proposals on trial by jury, double jeopardy and the disclosure of previous convictions during criminal trials. We fully acknowledge the truth behind Lord Justice Auld's statement that criminal justice is not and should not become a game. Like the Home Secretary, we want the guilty to be convicted, but we remain inalienably attached to the principle of the presumption of innocence. That also applies to the principle that the prosecution should continue to have to show beyond reasonable doubt that the accused is guilty.

We will scrutinise with energy and in detail the provisions of the criminal justice measure that deal with those matters. We shall seek agreement and constructive solutions, but we will use every parliamentary means at our disposal to prevent the enactment of measures that contravene or threaten the fundamental principles that I described.

David Winnick (Walsall, North): I appreciate from studying the Conservative amendment that the right hon. Gentleman has not rejected the change to double jeopardy out of hand, but would not such a change require compelling evidence to persuade the Court of Appeal? It could not simply be decided to prosecute again a person who had been acquitted of a major offence for that same offence. The Court of Appeal will have to be persuaded that compelling evidence exists. In practice, it is unlikely that there would be more than half a dozen cases in four or five years.

Mr. Letwin: The hon. Gentleman will not be surprised to know that we spotted that. However, how will the jury engaged in the retrial be prevented from presuming guilt if its members discover that the Court of Appeal has already ruled that compelling evidence exists to

suggest guilt? The Government will have to answer that question in drafting the Bill, and we shall investigate the matter.

David Winnick: Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Letwin: If the hon. Gentleman will forgive me, we shall have plenty of time to deal with the matter in detail when we examine the Bill.

We shall not acquiesce in any measures in a European arrest warrant that lead to the arrest of people in this country for actions that are not crimes in this country. We shall vigorously oppose a European arrest warrant that compromises the principle of the presumption of innocence. Let us be clear about what such a warrant means. If a British citizen publishes in Spain a statement that is construed by the Spanish courts to constitute xenophobia, he could be tried in absentia. Without having broken a law in this country, he could be removed to prove his innocence before a Spanish court that presumes him guilty. We cannot accept that.

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. David Blunkett): I am sorry to intervene at this stage of the right hon. Gentleman's speech, but we must be accurate about the European arrest warrant. The proposals in that element of the Bill would ensure that no country could try someone in absentia on the ground that they are presumed guilty. Under the European convention on human rights, which the right hon. Gentleman has often attacked, there must be a presumption of innocence. The Bill will make it clear that no country will have the right to extradite under the European arrest warrant without agreeing to the presumption of innocence.

Mr. Letwin: I fear that, having examined the detail of the measure so far, I am not convinced that that is the effect of the drafting. If we become so convinced, that will be a great help. However, I have a dark foreboding that we are heading towards a major parliamentary battle about the European arrest warrant.

I fear that we may also have a battle about the international co-operation Bill. We thought that it would be an uncontroversial measure, and we warmly support the strengthening of international co-operation in the war against terrorism. Without adequate safeguards, however, we cannot countenance police officers from another jurisdiction mounting a surveillance operation in this country without the permission of a British judge.

About 10 days ago, the Prime Minister wrote a most illuminating article in *The Observer*. In it, he rightly said:

"Crime and social breakdown affect everyone, but it is the poorest and most disadvantaged whose quality of life suffers most."

He went on to say that

"this autumn we will focus on tackling these problems. We are pursuing radical reform of the Criminal Justice System, tackling anti-social behaviour and restoring social cohesion to fragmented communities."

I have recently been reading another remarkably similar speech, in which the speaker also referred to

"the fracturing of social cohesion".

A press release from the same source on the same date called for

"a new national strategy for crime prevention",

and the same speaker went on to echo the Prime Minister's recent article in *The Observer* by pointing out that

"it is the weak and the vulnerable who suffer most from crime".

[Interruption.] That second speaker was not, as has just been suggested, my right hon. Friend the Member for Kensington and Chelsea (Mr. Portillo); nor was it the Home Secretary. It was none other than our current Prime Minister, when he held my post of shadow Home Secretary in 1993.

I wonder whether I am alone in finding this process a trifle surreal. It is almost as though someone else had been governing the country for the past five years. It is almost as though each year sees a new relaunch of the same ambition, a new start to history, and as though time past disappears in a constantly reinvented present. There is a reason why listening to the Prime Minister is such a surreal experience, and a reason for the constant reinvention of the present. Alas, the record of delivery—or, rather, of non-delivery—requires the progressive elimination of history. The single biggest test of a criminal justice system is its ability to catch and convict criminals. This Government have failed that test. When the Prime Minister first called for a new national strategy for crime prevention in 1993, he pointed out that only about one in 25 crimes resulted in a conviction. He regarded that as a damning indictment of the previous Government. Today, after five years of a Labour Government, only one in 40 crimes result in a conviction.

Let me give another example of the year zero principle in action: the example of asylum. We have recently seen the completion of the passage of an asylum Bill. Its main purpose was to redress the damage done by the extraordinarily inept measures taken by the current Foreign Secretary when he was Home Secretary. Those ineptitudes are to be addressed by introducing—alas, in a somewhat cack-handed fashion—a panoply of Conservative measures once derided by the present Prime Minister and the present Foreign Secretary: the white lists, the denial of social security payments to those who do not claim asylum at the port of entry; and the accommodation centres. We hope that the new measures will bring about improvements, but, whatever the future may hold, the record of the last five years on asylum has been utterly dismal.

I fear that the record on reoffending is no better. The Lord Chief Justice recently said:

"I think that Government policy has to concentrate on avoiding reoffending. The reoffending figures are appalling".

He was right. When young people are convicted, they re-offend with appalling frequency: 75 per cent. of young offenders are reconvicted within two years of leaving our young offender institutions.

Mr. Blunkett: Since the introduction of the Youth Justice Board and our new measures, has there not been a 14.6 per cent. drop in juvenile reoffending? Is that not a success by anyone's standards?

Mr. Letwin: A 14.6 per cent. drop sounds like a lot, until we realise that the figure for reconviction within

[Mr. Letwin]

two years is still about 70 per cent. I fear that there is no sign in the Queen's Speech of serious and radical proposals for long-term reform of the sentencing of young offenders. We have made proposals that could lead to the effective rehabilitation of such offenders, but I see no sign of that from the Government.

Mr. George Howarth (Knowsley, North and Sefton, East): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Letwin: I shall in a moment.

We will not seriously cure reoffending unless we seriously address the dreadful and growing problem of heroin and cocaine addiction among our young people. Conservatives have made proposals to multiply tenfold the availability of intensive residential rehabilitation for young heroin and cocaine addicts and to compel them to take up such treatment and rehabilitation. I see no sign of such measures from the Government. Indeed, the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, the hon. Member for Coventry, North-East (Mr. Ainsworth), who is in his place, has provided me with a written answer that makes it clear that treatment places means individuals "reported as in contact" with treatment agencies.

The Government claim to have 118,000 treatment places, or, rather, 118,000 people in contact with treatment agencies. A different picture emerges when one realises that there are, in fact, only some 2,000 to 3,000 intensive residential treatment places in this country. The Government do not even know precisely how many there are. They content themselves instead with determining the number of people in contact, much as they content themselves with determining the number of waiting patients who are in contact with the national health service. Contact, as Nurse Edith Cavell would have said, is not enough.

John Mann (Bassetlaw): What evidence base has the right hon. Gentleman used to determine that residential rehabilitation works in treating drug offenders?

Mr. Letwin: The evidence base is enormous, and the most compelling case is that of the Netherlands, where the average age of heroin and cocaine addicts is increasing by about 360 days each year. In other words, almost no young people are joining the queue. The reasons for that achievement are twofold: the intensive and coercive use of intensive residential rehabilitation and, as a result of those measures and the splitting of the market, the young people of the Netherlands coming to regard heroin and crack as unfashionable.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Letwin: I shall give way in a moment. We are nowhere near achieving that in this country, although I join the hon. Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann), who has done good work in this field, in hoping that we can move to a position under which we try wide experiments with many kinds of rehabilitation that work.

John Mann: I totally endorse a wide menu of treatment. The right hon. Gentleman mentioned the Netherlands, but a written report presented last week by the Netherlands Government to the European Observatory on Drugs makes no reference to residential rehabilitation. Indeed, the Netherlands approach outlined in that report does not incorporate residential rehabilitation.

I do not dismiss a small role for residential rehabilitation, but I ask again, precisely what is the evidence base on which the right hon. Gentleman makes his criticism of the Government by suggesting that a large amount of residential rehabilitation is needed? Which Netherlands evidence is he quoting?

Mr. Letwin: I have, perhaps unlike the hon. Gentleman, visited residential treatment centres in the Netherlands and I have spent time with the Ministry of Public Health and Hygiene. I have talked to drug addicts who are and who have been in treatment and I have repeatedly visited residential treatment centres in other countries, including Sweden and this country. If he seriously denies that residential treatment is required for a considerable proportion of those who are seriously addicted to heroin and cocaine, I fear that he is living in a fool's paradise.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Letwin: I wish to make progress.

There is a problem, which is how we are meant to take seriously the Prime Minister's promise to be tough on the causes of crime when his Government have failed to take serious and radical steps to lift young people off the conveyor belt to crime. How can we take seriously his statement that he will be tough on crime itself when his Government have not been serious about neighbourhood policing? The prospective criminal has a 97.5 per cent. chance of not being caught and convicted, so the need for such neighbourhood policing is acute. If antisocial behaviour is to be tackled seriously, that will not be done by legislation. If low level disorder is to be tackled seriously, that will not be done by legislation. It can be done only through neighbourhood policing. That means police on the streets, police officers proactively sniffing out low level disorder and crime, and police officers who are not hampered by vast reams of bureaucratic requirements and national policing plans. That means police officers being present where and when disorder and crime occur, seeing and being seen, protecting and being seen to protect the public, and recapturing the streets for the honest citizen.

We are five years into a Labour Government, yet a BBC poll reveals that 28 per cent. of the population cannot remember when they last saw a police officer. Of course, the Government tell us that they have reached record levels of policing. Once again, we are facing the airbrushed theory of history. What the Government mean is that they have very recently, and very slightly, exceeded the number of police officers that they inherited from the previous Conservative Government. Between 1993 and 1997 there were, on average, 127,000 police officers in England and Wales. In the five years of this Labour Government there have been, on average, about 126,000 officers in England and Wales. We should note that 126,000 is fewer than 127,000, not more. At a time when my own county of Dorset is under threat of losing 270 of its police officers from a force that is

already ludicrously overstretched, no one in rural areas is going to believe that this Government are serious about neighbourhood policing.

Mr. Blunkett: I should like to give the right hon. Gentleman some very good news, which I gave to the conference of the Association of Police Authorities in Harrogate this morning. We have decided not to withdraw the rural policing element, so I am sure that he will stand up and say how pleased he is that Dorset's force has been saved from the vagaries of changes in the formula.

Mr. Letwin: Hallelujah! If the Home Secretary would like to add that he will withdraw and reconsider the national policing plan, and that he will engage in serious neighbourhood policing, we would be genuinely very grateful.

Sir Brian Mawhinney (North-West Cambridgeshire): Before my right hon. Friend gets too carried away by the Home Secretary's announcement, will he reflect on what sort of Government would even contemplate removing rural policing funding?

Mr. Letwin: I fear that my right hon. Friend underestimates the effectiveness with which he and other Conservative Members may have determined the Home Secretary's position. The Home Secretary wanted to do something that was necessitated by the fact that he could see no other way of fulfilling certain targets that he had set. Now he has discovered that enough of a fuss has been made, he undoes that effort.

As my right hon. Friend the Member for North-West Cambridgeshire (Sir Brian Mawhinney) knows, it is not unusual for Governments to try to find the easy way out. Thank goodness that this particular easy way out has been blocked. The fact is that this Government have no real regard for rural areas. They are perfectly willing to lunge for that easy option if they think that they can succeed, but when a fuss is made, thankfully, they retract.

Mr. Chris Pond (Gravesham): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Letwin: I will not for the moment, but I shall later.

I cannot find it in me wholly to blame the current Home Secretary for all these problems.

Mr. John Bercow (Buckingham): Oh, go on.

Mr. Letwin: No, I shall resist that temptation.

The sad truth is that the current Home Secretary appears unable effectively to deal with his right hon. Friend the Chancellor. It was once said in Russia—where the main newspaper used to be called "the truth" and the main news agency was called "the news"—that there was no truth in the news and no news in the truth. I fear that, in its presentation of its spending plans, the Home Office has clearly been following that pre-glasnost pattern.

Internal Home Office papers, revealed by *The Guardian*, show that Home Office civil servants admit that

"there is no serious prospect of any money being made available for secure training centres"

which is one of the objectives. Home Office officials are also quoted as admitting that they have signed "the death knell" for this Government's aim of

"diversification for the prison service."

Indeed, the muddle on finances is so great that this toughest of all tough Home Secretaries finds himself making 17 per cent. of offenders subject to early release.

Wherever we look, we fail to see coherent, focused, long-term programmes to take young people off the conveyor belt of crime. We fail to see coherent, focused, long-term programmes to recapture the streets for the honest citizen through true neighbourhood policing. We fail to see properly organised finances that can support delivery of ambitious programmes. Instead, we see targets, units and initiatives.

In 2000, the Home Office set a target to increase the number and proportion of recorded crimes for which an offender is brought to justice. So far, the number has reduced, not increased. In the same year, the Home Office set a target to reduce the proportion of people under the age of 25 reporting the use of class A drugs. There has been no reduction, and the use of cocaine has risen. In 2000, the Home Office set a target of reducing robbery in our principal cities: since that date, robbery in our principal cities and elsewhere has increased.

I referred earlier to the Home Secretary's energy, which is prodigious. We have so far counted 95 initiatives since he came to office. Nor, over five years, have the Government lacked legislative energy. We have had the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, the Criminal Justice Act 1998, the Magistrates' Courts (Procedure) Act 1998, the Human Rights Act 1998, the Youth Justice and Criminal Evidence Act 1999, the Football (Offences and Disorder) Act 1999, the Terrorism Act 2000, the Football (Disorder) Act 2000, the Criminal Justice and Court Services Act 2000, the Sexual Offences (Amendment) Act 2000, the criminal justice Bills of 1999 and 2000, which were withdrawn, the Criminal Justice and Police Act 2001 and now, of course, five new Bills.

The legislative ambitions have been vast and, mostly, laudable, but have they delivered? The Home Secretary prefers to forget that when the present Foreign Secretary was the Home Secretary he said that

"we need a criminal justice system which deals with defendants quickly, efficiently and fairly."

He was right. The sad truth is that the present Home Secretary does not think—any more than I do—that his right hon. Friend delivered such a criminal justice system. That is why the Home Secretary said in March that

"confidence in the criminal justice system is low, and understandably so."

He is not the only person to have noticed that. The Minister for Criminal Justice, Sentencing and Law Reform recently and rightly told us that people

"have a deep and profound sense that the criminal justice system is failing."

The Commissioner of Police of the Metropolis recently told us that, after five years of this Government,

"the public are more than disenchanted with criminal justice—they are fed up with it."

[Mr. Letwin]

The chairman of the Victims of Crime Trust told us this year:

"I have never seen the criminal justice system in such disarray."

Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): The right hon. Gentleman knows that I join him in many of his criticisms, but does he accept that they could equally be made of his colleagues in the 18 years before he entered the House? The last Tory Government had 37 Home Office Bills, including 13 in the last year. However, crime doubled under the Tories and violent crime went up every year. In the last five years of the Tories, police numbers fell. On behalf of his party, does the right hon. Gentleman now say that those approaches and parliamentary initiatives were wrong and inadequate? If that is so, does he have a commitment to the funding to deliver what he says he wants and does he have a figure for the number of police that England and Wales need?

Mr. Letwin: The hon. Gentleman is in the enviable position of being able to attack everyone on all occasions. We are currently discussing the question of whether this Government have delivered, and my argument is that they have not. The fact that we have had problems in the past—and we have—is not to deny that we succeeded in reducing crime significantly at the tail end of the last Government, because of the measures that the then Home Secretary took, which were right and which have been continued by the present Government, to their credit. The Government came to power saying that they would solve all the criminal justice problems that we had left unresolved. They have failed to do so.

We have had five years of Labour Government. We have had 12 criminal justice Bills. We have had vaulting ambitions, boundless energy and countless initiatives, but we have not had a clear, settled and effective policy. We have not had results or delivery. Let us hope that this year will be the first year in the five-year history of this Government that is truly a year of delivery for the citizens of this country, who face disorder on a scale that concerns all and terrifies some.

4.4 pm

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. David Blunkett): We are all agreed that there is a problem. We are all agreed that the official Opposition will help us with that problem. They will help us because they agree that there is a problem. They even agree that there is a problem that needs to be addressed and that legislation might be a good idea. They even agree that, in principle, the legislation that the Government are bringing forward might be worth supporting. There is only one proviso: that during the Bill's passage through the House, and especially in the House of Lords, the Opposition will go out of their way to do anything that they can to stop the legislation reaching the statute book. Moreover, they will take every opportunity to undermine the Government's efforts to make the legislation workable. That is my experience over 18 months as Home Secretary.

I want to make an offer—

Mr. Dominic Grieve (Beaconsfield): I am surprised at what the Home Secretary has said. I remember that the Under-Secretary, the hon. Member for Coventry, North-East (Mr. Ainsworth), thanked the Opposition, at the end of the passage through the House of the Proceeds of Crime Bill, for their contribution to proceedings. I recollect that about 60 amendments tabled by the Opposition were accepted by the Government and incorporated into the legislation, which was thereby improved. Is that what the Home Secretary is referring to?

Mr. Blunkett: My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary is a decent, honourable and courteous man. After 459 clauses and half his life, he felt the need to thank those who had helped him both in Committee and in the House. I do not think that he was quite as grateful to those in the House of Lords who got in the way of making the Bill more workable.

I was about to make what I think is a generous offer. Yesterday, the shadow Home Secretary was generous enough to say that, with a fair wind, the Government's proposals would have the Opposition's support—subject, of course, to the detail of the legislation being acceptable. I accepted what he said. I want to make an offer to the right hon. Gentleman and to the Liberal Democrat spokesman, the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes). They are welcome to suggest changes and improvements as we move through legislation, and to bring forward their own legal advice if they think that the Government's advice is flawed.

I cannot say fairer than that. We have established, as we did yesterday, that we are in such agreement that only two questions remain: is the Home Office up to drafting something that will work, and will the result have the impact that we want? I want the answer to both questions to be in the affirmative. I think that we can move forward in a spirit of total unanimity. I nearly said anonymity, but unanimity is the better way to describe it.

I shall turn to one or two points raised by the right hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) in relation to terrorism. The Leader of the Opposition has enjoined the right hon. Gentleman to make the interesting if slightly zany suggestion that we copy the Americans and create a homeland tsar of Cabinet rank. Presumably, we would also have to create a homeland department to back that tsar.

I want to get this matter out of the way, as it is causing great disquiet. People have read *The Sunday Times* and the *Daily Mirror*, or reprints of the relevant articles. There is a genuine worry that needs to be dispelled, so I shall deal first with the structural issue.

Would it be a good idea to have one person of Cabinet rank whose sole job was to oversee and co-ordinate anti-terrorism measures—and that would include the work of the security service and the anti-terrorism branch of the Metropolitan police—and the civil contingencies now known as resilience? That person would take forward measures to enhance the plans that are already well worked out as a consequence of the threat of terrorism from Ireland. Would it help if one individual had that responsibility? At present, colleagues are

required to co-ordinate through Cabinet Committees. They take responsibility and are held to account for the matters with which they have to deal for the funding that they oversee; and for the priorities that they have to weigh. Would it be better if that responsibility were put into one person's hands? That would detach measures on resilience and anti-terrorism from the mainstream activity of Government Departments.

A couple of weeks ago the House discussed the protection of Heathrow, in connection with proscription orders. Would it better for the Department for Transport to deal with that, or a separate Cabinet Minister? Would it be better for the Department of Health if a Cabinet Minister took away the role of determining and weighing priorities, of integrating with local activity, trusts and the work of the chief medical officer, and centralised it? Would it be better if a Cabinet Minister intervened in the detail of every Department rather than requiring Sir David Omand to produce integral reports highlighting and reinforcing the need for improvement where it is required and supporting the Cabinet Committees in getting buy-in from everyone across Government, not separating it into one person's bailiwick?

More important still, would it help to build the confidence of and reassure the nation if every time a newspaper made something up, that Cabinet Minister was expected to answer for it at the Dispatch Box? Would it be right, on the back of what *The Sunday Times* wrote or the interesting story in the *Daily Mirror* with named underground stations—reminiscent of a similar article by the same journalist on Irish terrorism—for a Cabinet Minister to jump up at the Dispatch Box or appear on the "Today" programme? I think not. The result would be that someone's whole focus in life would be answering the kind of scurrilous rumour-mongering that destroys the chance of getting real messages across so that when we say that there is a specific warning and indicate that there is a particular problem, people will not believe us.

Mr. David Cameron (Witney): I have listened to the Home Secretary very carefully and I accept that it is a fine and difficult judgment. However, does he accept that there is an issue of time? As Home Secretary, the right hon. Gentleman has six Bills to take through the House. The Secretary of State for Health has a complicated 10-year plan to deliver. The Secretary of State for Defence is probably about to be involved in a war in Iraq. And as for the Deputy Prime Minister, we will leave him on one side. Who will have the time and focus to get it right? We have seen conflicting answers to the same questions over recent weeks.

Mr. Blunkett: I do not believe that we have. I do not think that evidence has been adduced to indicate that conflicting answers have been given. I have been quite prepared to welcome the right hon. Member for West Dorset and the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey for briefings and I will continue to do so. If they can show me contradictions in what has been said—bearing in mind the fact that those who are close to these matters, as well as journalists, know perfectly well who is responsible for speaking on behalf of the Government on these matters—I would be happy to write to the hon. Member for Witney (Mr. Cameron) and apologise.

There have not been contradictions; we have indicated that wild fantasies from those who do not carry responsibility for the consequences of their speculation in the media and elsewhere have not helped. That is very different from people saying that there have been contradictions in the message coming from the Government. I appeal to the British media: do not hide the truth or duck finding out what is going on, but for God's sake do not make things up on the back of the speculation of people who wish to demonstrate that they know more than others and think that they should be listened to.

On 9 September I placed in the Library of the House a substantial update setting out the steps that we had taken over the previous year. I updated this two weeks ago. Yes, there was a cock-up in the Home Office. I am not normally known for enthusiastically embracing every tenet of open government for its own sake, but on this occasion I do not think that anyone could floor us for having issued a draft for quarter of an hour and then having reissued the correct one. There was the first draft, then there was the correction—I have explained what happened. I have also explained that I do not believe that the term "dirty bomb" takes us any further, which is why we removed it. We did not remove the wider general warning and update that was repeated by the Prime Minister at the Lord Mayor's banquet and has been repeated by him since, including on television earlier this week.

David Winnick: Although I accept both what my right hon. Friend said to the shadow Home Secretary and what the Prime Minister said earlier, does my right hon. Friend agree that there was much public disquiet arising from reports that appeared during the past week or so, even if some of them were inaccurate? Does he also agree that terrorists would not have the slightest reluctance to strike at Britain if it was at all possible? In those circumstances, although I realise that some information cannot be given for security reasons, is there not a need to give as much information as possible, so that the public have a pretty good idea—no false optimism but no reason to panic? Such information should, of course, come from the highest level of the Government.

Mr. Blunkett: That is precisely why we issued information both on 9 September and two weeks ago. That is precisely why, on 11 July, the House debated the update on the excellent report produced by the Intelligence and Security Committee. That was a damn good debate, yet only one newspaper—one national newspaper—reported any of it. That is the level of interest when no mindless speculation is going on. If any newspaper reporter has evidence that we have not presented the public with a specific warning or that there is a specific danger, I challenge them to bring it to me personally today, tomorrow or any time. They have open access to my office.

We need to be transparently honest with the British people. Only then will people stop continually crying wolf, so undermining real opportunities to give warnings should the need arise. At present, there is the same level of heightened concern that we experienced at the same time during the run-up to Christmas last year. As I pointed out, there are concerns about the way in which we presented, and answered questions in the

[Mr. Blunkett]

House on, the extra measures resulting from Sir John Wheeler's report on Heathrow. We indicated, as we did when we laid the orders, that we would reconsider issues that hon. Members have raised in relation to ports. We have constantly been prepared to consider suggestions for improvements.

There is general heightened awareness. There is no specific warning from the security or intelligence services about a designated attack in this country, about a site or about a method of achieving such an attack. There is a level of vigilance and security activity that has led to the arrest of those suspected of involvement in developing, planning or preparing to carry out terrorist acts.

We owe a debt of gratitude to the Security Service and to the anti-terrorist branch for what they are doing and for their continued vigilance. That is what I want from the services. I shall continue to undertake a co-ordinating role—that is what it is. I shall continue to report to the Prime Minister, which is the correct route, in order to safeguard the British people in the best possible way.

Should there be a specific and verifiable need for a warning and should we believe that such a warning could aid people to protect themselves or provide additional warning to others, or that it could, in any way, contribute to foiling a possible attack, we shall say so and we shall issue that necessary warning. That is a promise from the Government as a whole.

I have every confidence in the services and in their capability, and I hope that hon. Members will accept that. If there is a specific and verifiable issue that requires an answer, I shall always come to the Dispatch Box, but I make it clear again: to come to the Dispatch Box on the back of every piece of speculation would heighten tension and raise fears. It would discredit the process when there really was something to report to the House. That is the stand that I intend to take.

Simon Hughes: The Home Secretary has our sympathy and support on this matter. Indeed, everything that he has said appears to be consistent with his public statements and those made by the Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister, and the exaggeration appears to be the result of the press speculating and exaggerating in an entirely unhelpful way. Given that we entirely accept all that the Home Secretary has said and agree that the approach is right, does he agree that any structural change in the way that the Government deal with such things—there are arguments for such a change—should be done, first, in a considered way; secondly, if possible, with agreement throughout the House; and, thirdly, not off the back of a change in the structures in the United States, with its entirely different system and history, which it seems entirely inappropriate to mimic two months later?

Mr. Blunkett: Yes, I would give that assurance. When I met Tom Ridge twice two weeks ago, he indicated that the United States faces a difficulty not only because of its federal structure, with enormous power in the hands of the state legislatures and elsewhere, but because it does not have the equivalent of MI5. The United States has no internal security and intelligence facility in the way that we do, but it is considering one because it is interested in the way in which we operate. We did not pretend to Tom Ridge that everything is perfectly fine here or that there is no room for improvement; we said that we would like to learn from each other, and I hope that we can do so.

The massive department with a multi-billion pound budget for which Congress is now voting in relation to the homeland security facility is way beyond anything that we in this country could contemplate without completely dislocating not only our government procedures but the investment that we need in key services that secure the kind of lifestyle, economy and services that make this country worth living in in the first place. The message has been clear from all parties that we must not allow others to disrupt our economy and social life because, if we do, they have won. It is as simple as that.

Mr. Letwin: Of course I accept that there are limits to what can be done, but does the right hon. Gentleman accept that the Defence Committee report, which is not a partisan document, revealed very serious concerns about whether the co-ordination was working in any serious way? Leaving aside all the hype of what necessarily goes on during Prime Minister's questions at both Dispatch Boxes, does he accept that the National Audit Office report on the national health service gives serious cause for concern? Does he accept that my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr. Duncan Smith) was making a serious point when he mentioned that each of the Ministers currently most involved in such matters has a huge work load? I quail at the idea of doing such things myself. Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that, if this is a very serious concern for the whole Government, there needs to be some means or other by which someone or other is full-time in the job?

Mr. Blunkett: Someone or other is full-time in the job at some time or another, but it does not have to be a full-time politician, running around looking for a job to do. The right hon. Gentleman is quite right; I quail as well at the responsibilities that I hold, but I am very happy to keep them for a little longer. He is right to suggest that they are onerous, but they are integral to the security issues. The whole operation of the linkage between one aspect of Home Office work and another makes it the appropriate recipient for the political responsibility of co-ordination, as has been judged by different Governments for many years. We all agree that people should decentralise accountability and responsibility to those who carry it day to day, because we could not do such things from the centre. We are always being accused of being over-centralising, but people cannot have it both ways.

Yes, there is room for improvement. The NAO report suggested ways to improve and we are acting on them. We answered the work done by the Defence Committee in the normal way some time ago, but we also took its point about further co-ordination, which is why Sir David Omand, who is respected by everyone, has taken over, reporting direct to the secretary to the Cabinet on these matters. He is already doing a good job in pulling together and supporting the existing work

that has already been put in train. So there is a constant process of improvement—there must be. As I repeated earlier, if anyone thinks that there is a problem inside a service or elsewhere, let us have a go at improving it, rather than being defensive about it.

Mr. John Maples (Stratford-on-Avon): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Blunkett: I shall give way once more, and then I want to get on to the main issue.

Mr. Maples: The Home Secretary has talked a lot in the past few minutes about the need for co-ordination of various activities at Cabinet level. There is also a need to drive the change in the focus of our various security agencies, not all of which report to the right hon. Gentleman—some do, but some report to the Foreign Secretary. Their focus must be more on terrorism. I know that that is taking place, but there is a role to be played in driving that change and that focus, and in making sure that they have the resources to do it. That is not just a question of co-ordination.

Mr. Blunkett: The Prime Minister has direct responsibility in terms of the overall co-ordination of the security and intelligence services, and, through the Cabinet Secretary, for ensuring adequate resourcing. That resourcing has been put in place, and we have reported to the Intelligence and Security Committee on that resourcing and what was required. As it reported on 11 July, it was satisfied that we had done that. That was updated in the spending review.

It would be helpful if I now moved on to the main debate. I shall be brief, as I know that many Members wish to speak. First, there is no difference between the shadow Home Secretary and me on the presumption of innocence or on the test of reasonable doubt. I do not want us to enter into debates this winter with any doubt between us on these matters. I also want to highlight an interesting debate which we shall probably have on Second Reading, so I shall not refer to it in great detail today: how those who are most attached to universal jury trial are most suspicious about trusting the jury when it comes to issues such as double jeopardy. We all need to reflect on whether we believe what we are saying. If we trust the jury, and we trust the process of guidance from the judiciary, we should be aware of that.

Another issue that the right hon. Member for West Dorset raised, to which I want to take exception—many of the points on which we cross swords over the Dispatch Box are issues of principle or are good points that I am prepared to refute or to concede—is that of police coming from overseas, which is a good example of the right hon. Gentleman making a little mischief. We have to give the Opposition leeway for a bit of mischief, but I want to put the record straight. What this is really about is someone coming into the country who has been carrying out surveillance on someone abroad, and being given, under the proposals, five hours to continue that surveillance so that our internal forces can take over. That is a staggering erosion of our rights and civil liberties. I imagine that there might be a whole article in *The Daily Telegraph* on the subject over the next week or two. There are serious issues about the arrest warrant that we should, and will, debate—such as the presumption of innocence and the right of appeal to the district judge—but that is not one of them.

Mr. Bercow: What consideration has the Home Secretary given to the applicability to the debate on the European arrest warrant of the subsidiarity and proportionality protocol of the treaty of Amsterdam?

Mr. Blunkett: I think of nothing else. I have had difficulty sleeping recently, and now I know why. I am a great believer in subsidiarity in all its guises, which is why I want to refer briefly to the issue of neighbourhood policing, which was raised by the right hon. Member for West Dorset.

This is an interesting point. When I asked Bill Bratton to come across in January this year—he is the former New York police commissioner, who is now doing his bit in Los Angeles—I asked the chief constables to come along. I did so because I recognised that we would all want to embrace the kind of community policing that was successful in New York, and I said so when, a month after that, I had an interesting meeting with former Mayor Giuliani in this House. I was very pleased to be joined by the official Opposition, who shortly afterwards embraced the principles behind New York policing. I was pleased that we all agreed.

However, I cannot understand how I am supposed to dictate to chief constables the precise nature of their policing operations and the balance between intelligence-led policing and community neighbourhood policing while doing what the Opposition suggest. For example, the Police Reform Act 2002 was bitterly opposed some of, if not all, the time, although things sometimes changed from beginning to end. That legislation contained proposals about the links between community support officers and the people on the street and street wardens and about the need to reward those at the sharp end more through the new prioritisation and reward system. I sometimes ask myself a question, but let me ask everyone else; otherwise I shall lose them and they will fall asleep, and I will be left thinking of the question of the hon. Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) about subsidiarity.

Mr. George Howarth: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Blunkett: I will give way to my hon. Friend in a second. I just want to ask the House how I am supposed to order chief constables to introduce universal neighbourhood community policing and, at the same time, lay my hands off them so that they have operational responsibility.

Mr. Howarth *rose—*

Mr. Letwin *rose—*

Mr. Blunkett: Ah. With the forbearance of my hon. Friend, I will give way to the right hon. Gentleman, because I am fascinated to hear his answer.

Mr. Letwin: What is most interesting about the Home Secretary's remarks is how much they tell us about the

[Mr. Letwin]

way in which his mind works. He assumes automatically that, if we call for neighbourhood policing, we believe that the only way that it can be imposed is from on top. Has he considered the possibility that one might construct arrangements that would enable local populations to have an effect on whether they were properly policed?

Mr. Blunkett: I agree entirely with that, and I said so to the police authorities conference this morning. However, the amendment that the right hon. Gentleman and his colleagues have tabled blames the Government for not acting. It does not blame the chief constables, the police authorities or the failure to set up sufficient pressure groups at neighbourhood level. Incidentaliy, we agree on the need to fund neighbourhood watch and to vitalise communities. We agree on the civil agenda, but the amendment blames the Government. If I am to take the blame, I want to know what mechanisms to avoid the blame the right hon. Gentleman would give me. Then I will do my best, because I am sensitive to these matters to the point of bleeding when I am cut.

Mr. Letwin *rose—*

Mr. Blunkett: Don't make me bleed any more.

Mr. Letwin: I would not dream of asking the Home Secretary to bleed. However, has he considered it possible that it is the Government's responsibility to create structures that enable local communities in this country effectively to influence how they are policed as they can in the United States? The Government have not come forward with any such measures.

Mr. Blunkett: The national policing plan aims to do just that. It aims to ensure that, within the overall framework, the objectives are laid down at local level and that there is proper accountability as well as responsibility for operational policing at local level. We would welcome any suggestions that would strengthen the plan, because I am strongly in favour of that. I want to ensure that we in South Yorkshire do as well on street crime as the West Midlands or the Met. I look forward to South Yorkshire doing that.

Kali Mountford (Colne Valley) *rose—*

Mr. George Howarth *rose—*

Mr. Blunkett: I give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Knowsley, North and Sefton, East (Mr. Howarth) because he has shown incredible forbearance.

Mr. Howarth: Absolutely. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the truly surreal experience is to listen to the right hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin), who manages in the course of one speech to disagree with himself on at least three occasions? When my right hon. Friend reflects on the specific contents of his Bills, will he take note of the remarks of the chief constable of Merseyside, Mr. Norman Bettison, who, in welcoming the extension of the fixed-penalties scheme, has suggested that it might be beneficial to my constituents if it could be extended to cover juveniles as well?

Mr. Blunkett: The chief constable has a good point. We should consider doing that. I will ask my right hon. Friend the Minister for Policing, Crime Reduction and Community Safety and the Under-Secretary, my hon. Friend the Member for Coventry, North-East (Mr. Ainsworth), to produce proposals on that basis. That chief constable has won that argument.

In publishing the national policing plan with my right hon. Friend today, I realise that it can be attacked in two ways. One line of attack is to argue that the plan says too much and asks too much of people—in other words, that it has too many priorities. The other line of attack is to argue that it leaves things out. Given that people from similar organisations and, indeed, from the same organisations have made both criticisms, I am somewhat heartened by what we have achieved.

Kali Mountford: My right hon. Friend will recall that he visited my constituency recently. I am interested to discover what he learned from that visit because I observed the appropriateness of policing to particular communities. Policing works best when communities are supported by the chief constable and the divisional commander and when the police are supported by the community so that they work together to find the right partnership to make policing work. The police and the community in that area are as one in tackling crime, which is why there has been only one robbery in it in the past five years.

Mr. Blunkett: I was pleased to see that when I visited my hon. Friend's constituency at the end of September. In particular, I was struck by the mobilisation of the community. I think that the community constable had recruited 18 specials. I was most impressed by a young woman—I think she was called Donna—who gave about 20 hours a week of voluntary commitment, and she made a hell of a differenee. We are all agreed on that type of policing.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): The right hon. Gentleman is being generous in giving way.

Is the right hon. Gentleman saying that the national policing plan objectives do not displace local policing objectives? We thought that we had won the argument on rural policing a couple of years ago, only to find that by emphasising street crime in cities, the national policing plan countermanded the previous emphasis on rural crime. Notwithstanding today's good news on the continuation of funding, is the right hon. Gentleman really saying that his plans do not tie chief constables' hands?

Mr. Blunkett: There are differences within force areas. I presume that the hon. Gentleman is aggrieved because we have given his force substantial resources to take cognisance of street crime and all that goes with it, which means concentrating on Bristol. Within the overall resource allocation for street crime, and the requirement of 10 forces to give priority to tackling that scourge, force areas will need to reprioritise other activities. The national policing plan at a local level expects the force

to do that. Forces are asked to draw up their own plans, including clear objectives and priorities, and I hope that they will do that. But make no mistake about it: when we lay out in the plan that antisocial behaviour and disorder should be taken a great deal more seriously by forces than they have been, whose hands are going up in disagreement? Who will go back to their constituents and say that the drive by the Government across Departments and agencies, pulling together in a new Bill measures that all of us would sign up to, is wrong?

Before I touch on the wider measures in the Queen's Speech, let me explain why the Opposition are wrong to suggest that individual measures introduced over the past five and a half years do not make a difference. Yes, antisocial behaviour orders did not work as envisaged. That is why we have changed them, and I will change them again if I have to. However, more than 650 have been made.

Let us consider other initiatives that have been disparaged. There have been more than 9,000 drug treatment and testing orders, more than 2,100 intensive supervision and surveillance orders, more than 12,000 reparation orders and more than 14,000 action plan orders. There have also been more than 7,000 detention and training orders, almost 2,000 electronically monitored curfew orders, more than 6,500 referral orders and more than 1,770 parenting orders. Those measures were disparaged, but they have made a difference to people's lives and to communities.

The measures that will we introduce on antisocial behaviour and on local co-ordination and partnership working will be made to work. They will alleviate the scourge of antisocial behaviour, which causes problems not only because of its immediate impact but because, as most people now agree, when young people in particular get the idea that they can cock a snook at the police and get away with anything, they will not only carry on with what they are doing but grow into more serious crime.

Of course we need preventive measures. By 2005, the end of the spending review period, we will be spending £450 million on the activities of the Youth Justice Board alone, which is a massive increase, 100 per cent., since its establishment in 2000. By the end of the review we will also be spending 50 per cent. more on prison places, and there are already 13,000 more places. By the end of that period we will also be spending 80 per cent. more on the probation service. We have recruited 2,000 extra probation officers since the inception of the national probation service.

We have a tremendous way to go, but the real obstacle is the end-to-end review of the criminal justice system. Yes, the system is failing. Some £80 million is wasted on failed, cracked or postponed trials and 40 per cent. of witnesses are unable to give evidence the first time they attend court. There is a failure in my Department to get prisoners to court on time, which delays or postpones cases. The collation and presentation of evidence from the police and the Crown Prosecution Service does not work. The management of court listings, with its overbookings, does not work. The way in which some lawyers play the system makes "Bleak House" read like a fairy tale. We should and must slim down the wasted cost orders arising from the 30,000 cases that are postponed each year so that we can ensure that those orders are imposed and that the Legal Services Commission backs them up. We have to tackle the way in which people defend vested interests.

When I spoke at the Law Society's annual conference, I asked it to join us in finding a way forward. It has responded and is prepared to take up the challenge. I now challenge the Bar Council to do the same. It is no good people dragging themselves out of mediaeval England only to find that they have reached Tudor England. We need to be in the 21st century, where DNA, technical devices, electronic activity and all the methodology of a modern policing system are at our disposal. The criminal justice system and the judiciary must respond to that.

I do not attack the judiciary; I merely ask it to respond to the will of the people. We will shortly get a House of Lords judgment in the Anderson case. No one has to fear a democratically elected Parliament that exercises the will of the people in ensuring that the punishment not only fits the crime but sends signals to those who would commit the crime and allows us the space to have a correctional service that responds in a way that avoids reoffending.

Everyone fears that Parliament's failure to intervene, to be accountable and to exercise the authority to respond to the public will discredit democracy and will encourage those who want to turn against the system of government and the process that the judiciary undertakes independently on behalf of the people. We speak, and we are responsible and accountable to the people; it speaks, and is independent of the political process. In doing so, it needs to take account of the fact that in a democracy the two balancing factors have to go hand in hand. The balances and checks in our constitution must not be shifted to the point where the discrediting and the undermining of the legitimacy of our country's democratic Parliament leads others to hold it in disdain.

4.45 pm

Simon Hughes (Southwark, North and Bermondsey): The Liberal Democrats welcome very much this important debate on the Queen's Speech. It is right that the whole of the last day, which is traditionally important, is given over to law and order. The Home Secretary, the Conservative shadow Home Secretary, the right hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) and I have very different constituencies. However, there is not one of us who does not know that crime and the fear of crime is at the top of our constituents' agenda, so it is right to concentrate on these issues. I am grateful to the Home Secretary for his consistent and constructive willingness to have dialogue about the detail of the Government's programme. He has heard me say in the Chamber before that we will take that opportunity up. We have always responded so far and have had, I hope, constructive dialogue on various matters in the past and will seek to do so in the year ahead.

We are having this debate, quite properly, against the background of an enormous amount of Home Office legislation. In the first five years of the Labour Government, 37 Bills were introduced. I estimate that at least 20—others claim 12—were to do with law and order. I suggested to the Conservative spokesman a moment ago that this is no different from the style of the

[Simon Hughes]

previous Administration, under whom 51 Bills were introduced. In their last year alone,19 Home Office Bills were introduced, of which 13 dealt with law and order, so the phenomenon is not new. When we reflect on the way in which we deal with legislation in the year ahead, we must ask ourselves what we need to do here and what needs to be done elsewhere. How much do we need legislation and how much do we need administration to deal with the big issues confronting us all? How do we keep crime going down—I hope that journalists hear that, as according to the figures, it is going down with undesirable exception of violent crime—and make sure that detection and conviction go up?

Mr. Nick Hawkins (Surrey Heath): Violent crime is an important exception.

Simon Hughes: Indeed. The hon. Gentleman's Government failed lamentably to tackle that, as violent crime went up every year under the Tories. I hope that he accepts that violent crime decreased for some years under Labour, but is now on the up again. For me, it is the most important criminal justice issue—violence in our community is the most dangerous, insidious and unacceptable aspect of criminality.

There are no easy answers—if there had been, I hope that the previous five Governments would have found some of them—so we must try responsibly to work out the best way of responding. There are six Bills on law and order in the current legislative programme, of which three are almost entirely non-controversial, but that does not mean that there will not be lots of amendments and debate.

Generally, however, people accept the desirability of including magistrates and crown courts in the same system, as long as justice remains local to the community and is not moved away from people.

A sexual offences Bill, trailed yesterday, will be introduced. A largely modernising, non-discriminatory and consolidating measure with a lot of good new components, it received broad support yesterday from Members on both sides of the House.

There are two measures to deal with our international responsibilities. The Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, the hon. Member for Coventry, North-East (Mr. Ainsworth) will be responsible for the Extradition Bill and possibly the Crime (International Co-operation) Bill, which was published today. By and large, those measures too are good, but the difficult issue, as the Government know, is whether people should be taken from this country to be tried elsewhere without guarantees of adequate judicial process and whether people charged by foreign authorities should be pursued when they come here. Both aspects of the problem are dealt with in the two Bills which, no doubt, will be hotly debated in both Houses.

There are two controversial Bills, including the prospective antisocial behaviour Bill—we have no idea yet what it or the White Paper will include. The Home Secretary is smiling, because he knows that that is true. I got the impression, if I may say so, that concept of the Bill came up on the outside lane rather late in the day before the Queen's Speech. I detected that there was originally intended to be one criminal justice Bill, and then something came out of the stables and took off, in a race of its own. Such Bills have often fallen at the last fence. Indeed, some parts of such Bills have never got on to the course, or not got over the first jump.

When the Home Secretary was in the coda phase of his speech, listing the positive achievements of the past five years, my hon. Friend the Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) said quietly, "What about curfew orders?". That is an example of an initiative that emerged from the stalls, went to the starting point, but never appeared to be backed by anybody after that.

I hope that the Home Secretary will keep his word, as he has done with regard to other matters, and consult about the White Paper. There are some good antisocial behaviour initiatives in all our communities, and the best of the best must be shared and rolled out, if we believe that a particular initiative can have a wider application.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): Does my hon. Friend accept that where we do not have a White Paper and where we have not had pre-legislative consultation, there is a good case for pre-legislative scrutiny by an appropriate Committee or Joint Committee, as the Leader of the House suggested?

Simon Hughes: Not only do I support that, but I hope that in this case, where there is widespread interest and with so much knowledge out there, the Home Secretary might consider it appropriate for the Bill to have pre-legislative scrutiny, and also possibly to be considered by a Special Standing Committee, which could take evidence. People who give evidence could then feel part of the process. Antisocial behaviour affects communities, and if communities can have a say in the legislative process, they will feel much more engaged.

Many of us regret that the Bill that was not included in the Queen's Speech, was the one on corporate manslaughter. As the MP for a Thames-side constituency where the Marchioness sank, and with other colleagues around the House, I hope that it might still be brought in—not that we are asking for more work—under the additional opportunity provided by the statement,

"Other measures will be laid before you",

as it is extremely important and it has been in the gestation phase for a long time.

I have one word to add to the important exchange that took place earlier on homeland or domestic security. That is, of course, the most important issue facing us. I hope that the Home Secretary knows that all of us, in all parts of the House, will work with the Government of the day and the Cabinet Ministers of the day to retain confidences and to share information and try to make sure that our citizens are protected to the best of the ability of all our services at all times. I join him in paying tribute to the security services, and in expressing surprise that the excellent debate that we had went entirely unremarked, although there were some important contributions.

I hope that there is a real debate about how best we cope with international terrorism. My intervention was not meant to say that there is not merit in the argument from the Conservative leader; indeed, our party

suggested that the matter be considered. The idea is not new for us, but we advance it in a deliberative and careful way. We need to reform Government sensibly, intelligently and gradually. We should not suddenly come up with an idea and think that that is the complete solution. It must be the case, though, that solutions for a huge federal state like the United States would generally be inappropriate for a much smaller unitary or nearly unitary state like ours.

Lembit Öpik (Montgomeryshire): Does my hon. Friend agree that whatever we do with regard to homeland security, we must remember that among the things that we are protecting are individual freedoms? It would be a sad day if we ended up compromising the civil liberties of the innocent general public in order to try and catch the very small number of people who seek to violate them.

Simon Hughes: My hon. Friend raises a hugely important point. Our leader, in his response to the Queen's Speech last Wednesday, emphasised what unites all of us on the Liberal Democrat Benches. We are a party with a liberal tradition and a belief in civil liberty as the basis of our constitution. We start with the individual and individual liberty. That is why my hon. Friend and I voted together last year against many of the specific measures in the Anti-terrorism, Crime and Security Act 2001. We did so not because we are against dealing with terrorism or reducing crime and increasing security, but because we think, for example, that there are better ways of protecting liberty than keeping people locked up indefinitely without trial in a prison in south-east London. There was an honest debate about that issue and we will continue to make those points. I anticipate that we will advance them strongly in relation to one or two forthcoming Bills—not least the criminal justice Bill—and have the robust debate that the Home Secretary is always ready to have, although with an understanding of where the other parties are coming from.

Mr. Letwin: I am not clear from the hon. Gentleman's remarks whether he agrees that there are worrying signs that that issue, which should be the top priority—I think that the Home Secretary described it as such—is not currently commanding the sense of urgency that some of us believe it should have within the bureaucracy.

Simon Hughes: I shall try to make a careful response. I do not accept that view. I think that the issue is being treated with urgency and commanding the attention of the Government. In the past two weeks, two things went wrong, and the Home Secretary has effectively accepted that both here today and in broadcasts. First, administrative errors were made that did not help. I refer in particular to the error made a week ago last Friday in relation to the release of documentation. Secondly, communication problems therefore arose about whether there was a specific threat. I think that that was a management and communication performance issue.

I accept what the Home Secretary says with regard to a structure in which he chairs a Cabinet Committee that is reporting to the Prime Minister, who is clearly seeking to achieve the careful balance that he explained at the Mansion House. That shows that the issue is treated as one of huge importance, as was reflected in the visit made by Tom Ridge and the deliberations about Europe and so on. As my hon. Friend the Member for Montgomeryshire (Lembit Öpik) implied, the Liberal Democrats occasionally think that the Government overreact not in terms of the politics of administration, but in their legislative response. That is what we hope to draw attention to.

Let me turn to law and order more centrally and deal with a moral question that has not yet arisen and an aspect of our experience of our politics that has not yet been reflected in the debate. The British crime survey shows that, since 1995, crime has been decreasing, yet we are punishing more and more. The Home Secretary has been clear in his personal views about the fact that we risk creating a society in which punishment becomes as central a feature of our criminal justice system as it has tragically and ineffectively become in the United States. If we continue to imprison more people, locking them up and keeping them out of society for longer, we will not reduce crime. Such an approach will probably reduce community cohesion and cause the recurrence of crime among people who enter schools of crime and come out better skilled as criminals. What we need to reduce crime is greater trust in strangers, forgiveness of wrongs, willingness in the community to intervene and willingness among people to be witnesses. We need a sense of community, and lots more imprisonment is not the right road to take.

Crime has increased massively in this country over the past 50 years, but that does not mean that if we have a choice between building prisons and communities, the answer is to build prisons. In the Liberal Democrats' view, the answer is to build communities. If we take the American road, with 2 million-plus people in prison and huge violent crime in inner cities, we risk abandoning our values along the way.

Mr. Chris Mullin (Sunderland, South): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Simon Hughes: Before giving way to the Chairman of the Select Committee on Home Affairs, I shall cite one example to illustrate a view that many others in history have held. While Winston Churchill was Home Secretary, the number of people imprisoned because of debt fell from 100,000 to 2,000, because he believed that it was wrong for people to be locked up for debt.

Mr. Tyler: Liberal.

Simon Hughes: Indeed. The number of young men in prison under the age of majority fell by two thirds, because it was perceived, even at that time, that more imprisonment was the wrong road to take and that there were alternatives. Prison is a simplistic answer; custody is an easy answer, but it is very often the wrong one, apart from in very particular, obvious and extreme cases.

Mr. Mullin: I do not want to dispute the hon. Gentleman's general point, but it is a precondition of building communities that some individuals are got out

[Mr. Mullin]

of the way of the rest so that everyone can get on with their lives. That will be as true in his constituency as it is in mine.

Simon Hughes: I accept that. However, as the director general of the Prison Service says every time he makes a public statement, and as the Lord Chief Justice and many others say, prison must be the last resort.

As I said at our party conference, violence to others should carry a presumption of custody. That is in a different league from property crime. One or two other crimes merit custody—for example, interference with the course of justice, which was mentioned earlier, and sex offences against young people. Society should have a clear view on those crimes. Some driving offences that result in death should also result in custody. Motorists who are guilty of bad, reckless driving that results in killing someone have often got off lightly, whereas a person who kills with bare hands is inside for a long time.

I therefore agree with the hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin): there comes a time when the regular offender has to go away, and the Prison Service must then be allowed to do its job of rehabilitation and of keeping offenders out of the way.

Mr. John Burnett (Torridge and West Devon): Would my hon. Friend add to his list of more heinous crimes white-collar crime involving a breach of trust—for example, preying on the elderly or the effective theft of other people's money by a professional person?

Simon Hughes: My hon. Friend has often raised that matter, which we do not debate sufficiently. Sometimes such crime should also mean custody. We must separate the breach of trust cases from those in which someone simply takes advantage of a happy chance, resulting in benefit to a white-collar criminal. The matter should be on the agenda for our debates on the criminal justice Bill; they will begin later this week with the publication of the Bill. White-collar crime is significant, not least to our country's economy, giving rise to the perception in constituencies such as mine, and probably in my hon. Friend's, that well-off people sometimes get off lightly compared with the less well-off, who are punished severely for relatively minor infractions.

Mr. Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight): The hon. Gentleman managed one example of offences for which it was wrong to imprison: property crime. He drew back from that when the hon. Member for Torridge and West Devon (Mr. Burnett) intervened with an example of a heinous property crime. Which sort of property crime, for which imprisonment is currently common, does not require it?

Simon Hughes: I shall repeat my earlier comments in a different way. The criminal justice system would be much better if there were two simple presumptions: that those who commit violence against another person will go inside for a period, and that those who commit a different sort of crime will not automatically go to prison. Those should be the presumptions, and the court should then judge each case on its merits and ensure that the punishment fits the crime. I shall not provide a shopping list. We shall have plenty of opportunities to debate those matters when we consider the criminal justice Bill. *[Interruption.]* In case Labour Front Benchers assume that Liberal Democrats endorse the Home Secretary's campaign to free the Archer One, I should stress that my views on interference with the course of justice make that case a clear example of when someone should be put away.

We shall hold a proper debate on antisocial behaviour, but we must be careful that we do not automatically link it to violent, serious crime. Much antisocial behaviour falls short even of criminality. Much behaviour that people find irritating is not criminal. Young people who hang around, make a noise or congregate in inconvenient places are in a different league from those who commit serious crimes. We must be careful that, when dealing with antisocial behaviour, we do not place it in the same league as serious and violent crime, because often it is not. Of course, if antisocial behaviour is not checked and is allowed to develop, it can gradually lead to serious and violent crime. Indeed, that can often become inevitable.

Mr. Hawkins: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that his rather extraordinary presumptions about those who commit violent offences and those who commit non-violent offences run counter to a great deal of the thinking that has been advanced by experts such as the senior judges on the Judicial Studies Board? In the light of his legal experience in the criminal courts at the beginning of his career, I invite him to reflect on the difference between, for example, a case in which someone with no previous convictions throws one punch in a pub under provocation—an offence of violence—and one in which someone steals thousands of pounds of their employer's money, bringing the business close to bankruptcy. Does not such a distinction undermine his rather extraordinary presumptions?

Simon Hughes: No, it does not. A presumption is where we start from, not where we end up. Let me give an example. The Liberal Democrats have long argued that there should be no mandatory sentences, even for murder. If a murder were committed as a result of 30 years of marital provocation at home, we do not think that the person would deserve the same punishment as someone with no previous history of provocation who commits a terrible crime. I accept the need for different solutions for different crimes, and I do not think that the hon. Gentleman would disagree with that.

There are, of course, two drivers of crime—alcohol and other drugs—and unless we deal with them society will never make progress. The Hackney study released by the Metropolitan police today shows that, of all the people arrested for any offence, 66 per cent. did not show free of drugs, and 32 per cent. showed traces of cocaine. Unless we deal with the problems of drug and alcohol abuse, most of the people in our prisons will continue to return to them. I was in Cardiff prison 10 days ago, and both the people to whom I spoke in the first block were there because of abuse—the first because of drugs, the second because of alcohol—and they had been imprisoned several times. Unless they are dealt with properly, they are likely to be imprisoned again.

Those are the big issues: violence, alcoholism and drug addiction. We have to work out how we should respond to them.

I hope that we shall not leave these debates without also realising how many good initiatives there are for dealing with antisocial behaviour and prospective disorder among young people. I shall give hon. Members an example. Last week there was a press launch in the House for a scheme called INaura, based in Slough, the aim of which is to ensure that youngsters who are excluded from school have somewhere to go, rather than being out on the streets. Intervention at an early stage, as many good examples show, can prevent people from going into a life of crime. Acceptable behaviour contracts appear to work well, as do parent control agreements. There are many forms of intervention that do not involve the use of the criminal law.

Something that does not appear to work, however, is to punish families financially if their child has become out of control. That is why we have argued strongly against the idea of taking housing benefit away from those whose children misbehave, which seems discriminatory and entirely misjudged. It is also why we resist the idea of adding to the prospect of fining the parents of truanting kids. That might work occasionally, but it is the wrong road to go down in correcting the family failures that have been presented as the cause of the problems.

There is agreement, however, that, of all the things that work, putting people on the street to deter and prevent crime is the most successful. That is why we are grateful to the Government and glad that, in the last Parliament, they increased police numbers, halting the downward spiral and starting to build the numbers back up. We are glad that the numbers are higher, and we congratulate the Government on that. I believe that the numbers will have to go higher still. We shall need objective evidence and advice on how to achieve that, and on how many police are needed in, for example, Somerset and Avon, Devon and Cornwall, Northumberland or the Metropolitan police area.

I know the view in my borough. The MPs—two Labour and one Liberal Democrat—and the Greater London Authority member have, on advice and according to experience, worked it out with the police that we need 1,000 officers at minimum, although we have fewer than 800. I am sure that many other communities take a similar view. We also need special constables, and we shall be happy to use community support officers. Neighbourhood wardens can do an enormous amount to deal with antisocial behaviour.

A year ago last month, we set up a neighbourhood warden scheme in Bermondsey that involves just half a dozen people in uniform. They have dealt with 754 abandoned vehicles, 225 cases of graffiti, 269 cases of defective or non-functioning lighting, nearly 500 cases of fly tipping and nearly 500 hazards. Much more importantly, they have made 1,000 community contacts and offered victim support to between 50 and 100 people. Racist attacks have gone down and security has gone up.

People on the street make a difference, and they are the most effective way, in our judgment, to ensure that our communities feel safer. I have a simple view: every community needs policing and every community will rightfully go on fighting until it has its own policing and its own police, whether it is a village, a town or a city.

I share the Home Secretary's view that one defect of the criminal justice process is the number of people who never make it into the process at all, because they are frightened off as witnesses and sometimes frightened off even if they are the victim. I understand that, last year, 30,000 cases never went the course because people did not come to offer proof—they were not willing to say what had happened or to give their evidence. A real problem is not what happens once the case gets to court, but the fact that it never gets there in the first place. I hope that we concentrate on that.

I say to the Home Secretary that, although I anticipate us having disagreements on a few issues to do with the main criminal justice Bill, the real failure of the system is not that all the people who go to court get let off. They do not. Most plead guilty, and most of those who do not are convicted anyway. The problem occurs before people get to court: either they are never apprehended or, if they are, the witnesses do not turn up to give evidence.

I must say a word about the big issues for the criminal justice Bill. We are not persuaded that there is a case for reducing jury trial in, for example, serious fraud cases. There may be ways to assist the jury and there may be ways to empanel a more appropriate jury, but juries have the public's confidence because the public think that people who are more or less like them are deciding the case. That is also why they think that lay magistrates who do not do the job full-time are, by and large, preferable to professional judges and district judges.

We shall be very reluctant to support a proposal for retrospective changes in the double jeopardy rule, which would mean that everybody convicted of the most serious offences that may be retried would suddenly become provisionally guilty or only provisionally acquitted. The case might always come back. The argument for future cases is different, but the big question, which nobody has answered yet, involves trials such as those in the Stephen Lawrence case in south London and the Damilola Taylor case. If a second jury were asked to try people who had already been tried in relation to either case, would it not be fairly clear, given the rules, that they were trying the case only because the Crown Prosecution Service and the Court of Appeal had said that there was a very good case to answer. Given the media backdrop, would not that inevitably mean that it would be extremely difficult to have a fair trial the second time around?

Martin Linton (Battersea): Does the hon. Gentleman not accept that the argument against retrospective law is that somebody should not be convicted for doing something that was not an offence when they did it? That does not apply in the example of double jeopardy, as the act was an offence when they committed it and all they did was lie in court.

Simon Hughes: I understand that argument, but even if the principle were applied only in murder cases, for example, those acquitted would have only a provisional

[Simon Hughes]

acquittal for the rest of their lives. That is a bad thing in principle and in practice. It is not as if the criminal justice services do not have plenty to do.

Vera Baird (Redcar): The hon. Gentleman puts an argument that goes against not retrospectivity, but against the principle of scrapping double jeopardy in general. He speaks of how difficult it would be for future juries to forget past high-profile trials, but there will be high-profile trials in future, and it will be equally difficult for juries thereafter to forget that they have occurred. His argument has absolutely nothing to do with retrospectivity; rather, it relates to the need to formulate very carefully the test that permits a second trial. That can be done.

Simon Hughes: I understand the hon. and learned Lady's argument, but retrospectivity and the question of whether a fair trial can be ensured the second time around are two separate points. If it can be shown that a second trial can avoid the taint of prior media coverage, her argument might be adequate.

The third of three big issues to which I referred is previous convictions. The Home Secretary challenges us to accept previous convictions more frequently because he believes that juries should be able to see the whole picture in coming to a fair judgment. He says that we do not trust juries, but those of us who argue that previous convictions should not be disclosed do so because we believe that people should be tried for the offence for which they are on trial, without the whole of their previous life being an influencing factor. It will not be possible to have a fair trial if the fact that a person has been in trouble before, and been convicted, is frequently made known to the court. Of all the issues that we face, this one will give the Government the greatest difficulty in the House of Lords. I hope that, unless the Government change their position, Parliament as a whole will reject the proposal, because it will fundamentally change the principle that people are presumed innocent. It will put that principle at risk, and many more people will face the prospect of a jury that assumes that they are guilty.

I have mentioned the dangers of the prospects of increasing custody. However, I am equally worried by the apparent lack of clarity in the custody-plus plan, under which every sentence for a serious offence will have an equal sentence outside prison. Will it have the money to guarantee that people will get the continuing support from the probation service and the other services that they need? It would help if the Minister could explain whether Lord Falconer was correct in saying that the money will not be available for 10 years, or whether the Prime Minister was correct in saying that it will be available once the legislation is enacted. If we are to have successful punishment in the community, that money must be available.

When my right hon. Friend the Member for Ross, Skye and Inverness, West (Mr. Kennedy) spoke last Wednesday, he said that perhaps the big divide in Britain today is between the liberal and the illiberal, rather than between left and right. We hope that a similar divide exists between solutions that find favour with Parliament because they are tried and tested, and those that should not because they are just the latest gimmick; between solutions that have a long-term track record, and which will produce long-term answers, and those that are simply quick fixes; and between solutions that are likely to work, and solutions that just sound good.

We are as committed as others to fighting the battle against crime hard in order to bring it down, and to ensuring that we make our communities safer, but unless we make sure that we rehabilitate better, and that we prevent people from reoffending, as they so often do, we will not win that battle. In the year ahead, Liberal Democrats will work according to very simple principles. The justice system has to work equally for everybody. It must be trusted by lay people, because it is often led by them. People must be presumed innocent, not guilty. They must be treated with dignity, whether or not they have offended. Never will we give up on anybody, and never will we fail to believe that rehabilitation can work. We will come from that position, constructively, and we hope that we will have legislation that works, not just six more laws that—like many of those before them—make only a small, sometimes insignificant, contribution to reducing crime.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): Order. I remind the House that Mr. Speaker has placed an eight-minute limit on speeches from Back Benchers, which applies from now on.

5.20 pm

Mr. Chris Mullin (Sunderland, South): In the short time available to me, I shall concentrate my remarks on three proposed Bills: on criminal justice and sentencing, on antisocial behaviour and on the long-awaited Bill to regulate private rented accommodation—one of the few Bills that does not emanate from the Home Office.

I add my voice to the general welcome for the White Paper that outlines plans for a Bill to update the law on sexual offences. I was pleased to hear the Home Secretary say yesterday that he remains open to argument on anonymity for defendants in sex offence cases. That arises especially in allegations of child abuse, which are frequently made many years after the event on the shakiest of evidence and which frequently collapse long before they reach the door of the court, but not before they have ruined the lives of people who are, in many cases, wholly innocent. I draw the Home Secretary's attention to the recent report of the Home Affairs Committee on the subject.

We do not yet know what the criminal justice and sentencing Bill will contain, although if we can go by speculation in the media, it seems to grow fatter day by day. If the past is anything to go by, new clauses will still be appearing long after the Bill has left this place. Happy though I am to support any measures designed to improve the efficiency of our chronically inefficient system of criminal justice, one has to recognise that, as the right hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) said, many of the problems that we face do not require legislation but firm management, efficient policing and, above all, a cultural change that gives due recognition to the interests of victims and witnesses. Sometimes, although not as often as alleged, the problems we face also require more resources.

Some of the measures in the Bill will help to reduce delays and, in general, I approve of them. Others are designed to tilt the balance in favour of more convictions and with those we must be much more careful. I favour anything that turns our judicial system into a search for truth rather than a game between two competing teams of lawyers, but I would not wish to see the presumption of innocence—a fundamental principle of our law—undermined. I will therefore need much persuading that it is right to allow a defendant's previous convictions to be disclosed to a jury as a matter of course.

I also have concerns about proposals to require disclosure of defence witnesses other than alibi witnesses, who must already be disclosed. We have not yet seen the precise terms of the Bill, but will that mean that the police will be free to visit defence witnesses and, as they say in the trade, "refresh their memories" or, in some cases, help them to forget what they previously remembered? It is not unknown for defence witnesses to be threatened with prosecution, or to be prosecuted, solely with a view to discrediting their evidence. I hope that no one will claim that that is a thing of the past, because I had such a case at my surgery only the other day. I warn Ministers that if the provisions work in the way that I have outlined, they can and will be abused. We will return to those issues on Second Reading, but I flag them up now.

I am especially interested in the antisocial behaviour Bill. There is some mystery about its contents, but I am told that it will include measures to restrict the use of air weapons—a matter on which I have campaigned for some years. I hope that in due course we will also consider imitation weapons.

We live in a society where an increased sense of rights has been matched by a diminishing sense of responsibility. It is time that the balance was restored. Antisocial behaviour is the greatest challenge that we face. It is not so much organised crime as disorganised crime that makes a misery of so many people's lives.

People come to my office—I am sure that other hon. Members have had the same experience—and break down in tears, begging to be evacuated from homes in which they have lived peacefully for years because they cannot cope with the noise, abuse and endemic yobbery that plague their lives and against which the forces of law and order appear powerless. We have to end the culture of impunity that surrounds antisocial behaviour, and I hope that the Bill will help us to do so.

However, we should not make claims for the Bill that are too large. I am sure that Ministers will not do that. The Bill will not be a panacea, and it should not be seen in isolation. It is simply another small step—an addition to measures already taken to improve the quality of policing and education, to treat drug addicts, and to wean young people off benefits and into work—along the road to restoring our battered social fabric.

Finally, I warmly welcome the proposed Bill to deal with rogue landlords. The Bill will be published in draft early next year. As I said earlier, it is one of the few measures in the Queen's Speech that does not seem to have emanated from the Home Office. I am led to believe that the Bill will give local authorities the discretion to license both multiple occupancy tenancies and single tenancies. That will enable us to cut off the flow of housing benefit to landlords who decline to take responsibility for the condition of properties or for the behaviour of tenants.

The Bill is long overdue. At present, public money in the form of housing benefit is being used to fund the destruction of parts of our inner cities. That is especially true of some of our northern cities, where there are large amounts of empty property. It is an incredible situation, and I am amazed that we have tolerated it for so long. The 10 largest landlords in Sunderland between them receive more than £1 million in housing benefit, which travels directly from the civic centre bank account into their accounts without ever passing through the property for which it is being paid. It therefore gives the landlords involved no incentive ever to go anywhere near the properties that they own, and some of them have never visited their properties.

Cutting the flow of housing benefit to rogue landlords is potentially the most effective measure that we can take to reduce antisocial behaviour. I have pressed for this measure since I was a Minister at the former Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, and it cannot come soon enough.

In conclusion, I agree with those who have noted that there are no short cuts. Passing an Act of Parliament—or six, or 20 Acts—will not change the world. What matters is the cumulative effect. The Government have recognised from the outset that literacy, numeracy, training and then work are what will make the difference. It is a long, difficult and unglamorous road, but one from which there can be no turning back. Insofar as the Bills announced in the Queen's Speech help us along that road, they will have my support.

5.28 pm

Sir Brian Mawhinney (North-West Cambridgeshire): In my eight minutes, I want to make two points. The second of them is a constructive policy suggestion for the Home Secretary, and the first is a constructive criticism of the Government's record.

My right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) referred, in his excellent opening speech, to the grandiose promises made by the Prime Minister when he was shadow Home Secretary. It has been a characteristic of the Government to make big promises and not to deliver on them.

The House has been discussing antisocial behaviour orders, and my mind went back to the Crime and Disorder Bill, which was given a Second Reading in this House on 8 April 1998. The then Home Secretary—the present Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, the right hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr. Straw)—said that the Bill would

> "reverse the apparently inexorable rise in anti-social behaviour and teenage crime."

He told us:

> "The Bill will ensure earlier, more effective intervention to nip offending in the bud."

He told us:

> "It is one thing for Parliament to pass the Bill; it is another to ensure that it is implemented effectively. That is why we are working closely with practitioners to develop guidance on implementation".

[Sir Brian Mawhinney]

He told us:

"The Bill will make a real difference to the quality of life of people in this country. It will help to . . . secure decent standards of behaviour from everyone."—[*Official Report*, 8 April 1998; Vol. 310, c. 370–79.]

That was an overblown puffing up of a Bill, particularly the antisocial behaviour orders that it contained. I had the privilege at the time to be the shadow Home Secretary. I gave the Bill our support—we did not divide on Second Reading—but I warned the Government that they were in danger of creating expectations that could not and would not be fulfilled and, as a consequence, there would be a degree of cynicism that people would not find attractive. Modesty forbids me from quoting what I said, but right hon. and hon. Members will find it in column 382 of *Hansard*.

The fact that we are coming back to antisocial behaviour orders—which I still support—is a reflection of the Government's failure to deliver over the past five years. The Home Secretary told us today that just over 600 ASBOs have been issued. The Government promised that there would be 5,000 a year, so to date there are 17,000 fewer than there should be. If we had 17,000 more of them, the proposed legislation would almost certainly not be necessary. I ask the Government to resist their inherent inclination to overblow their legislation and to have instead a degree of realism to which right hon. and hon. Members on both sides of the House and the public can relate.

My second point is a policy suggestion for the Minister's consideration. The Home Secretary hardly mentioned prisons. Given the Government's record, that is understandable. It is not clear whether the Government favour putting more and more people in prison—for we have the highest number in prison in our history—or getting them out of prison and back into the community. If I were the guardian of a policy that regularly released thousands of people early from prison for no other reasons than not having prison places and being unable to get any money from the Chancellor, I, too, would not wish to say much about my policy. However, part of the pressure on people to send their fellow citizens to prison is because the public have very little confidence in community punishment.

When I was shadow Home Secretary, I visited eight or 10 prisons. It reaffirmed my view, long held, that I do not belong to the minority of people who think that after people are put in prison, life should be made as miserable as possible to add to the punishment. That has never been my view. The punishment of prison is the adherence to a rigid regime and the deprivation of freedom. Yet community sentencing goes in exactly the opposite direction. It provides very little rigid regime and deprivation. I ask the Home Secretary to consider that he might do better to install a regime in the community that more effectively mirrored what prison does. If, instead of being free to roam around, people were restricted for longer periods—perhaps to their homes—so that their home or some specified environment became a substitute for prison and there was still an element of deprivation of freedom, my constituents and the general public might have more confidence in the policy.

At the same time, the Minister might take a look at his prison-building programme. Five and a half years ago, he announced that the Government would build a prison in Peterborough, yet five and a half years later the old buildings are still standing and nothing has been done. One reason that nothing has been done is that, as some of us pointed out to the former Secretary of State for Transport, Local Government and the Regions when he put Railtrack into administration, the costs of private finance initiatives would rise. The Minister should remember that if we are to have a prison in Peterborough. Given his statistics, we shall probably need one, so will he get on with it?

Finally, will the Minister look at the work of Prison Fellowship? It offers some of the most effective means of helping people to turn from their wicked ways.

5.36 pm

Denzil Davies (Llanelli): Sadly, at the heart of this year's Queen's Speech—its central theme—are crime, disorder and antisocial behaviour. There are to be four or five Bills. That shows the seriousness of the situation and how concerned the Government are about it.

I became a Member of the House in 1970 and, looking back over the past 30 years, my impression is that the situation as regards crime, disorder and antisocial behaviour has been getting worse and worse. From 1970 until the mid-1980s, crime and disorder were not a major problem in my constituency. Obviously, there was crime—there has never been a golden age—but there was little or no drugs problem in my constituency until the middle of the 1980s. Elderly people could live quietly on their estates, without fear that their doors would be kicked in, without fear of physical and verbal abuse or that bricks and stones would be thrown into their gardens. In Llanelli at that time, petrol was not thrown through letterboxes and ignited.

But something happened in the mid-1980s—or perhaps it was a manifestation of something that had happened previously. To test my impressions, I went to the Library—as, I assume, did the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes)—and checked the "Index to the Statutes" for the period 1970 to 2000. I examined statutes dealing with substantive crime and with procedure. I excluded Scotland, as it has a different system, but I included statutes on domestic and international terrorism. I tried to exclude the administration of justice, although there is some overlap between that, procedure and substantive crime.

My first impressions were confirmed, although the figures were startling. In the first decade, 1970–1980, seven statutes were passed; in the second decade, 1980–1990, there were 13; and in the third decade, 1990–2000, there were 27. There was a doubling every 10 years. Turning to the present century, there were two measures in 2000; three in 2001; and we are about to consider another four or five.

It is not, therefore, unreasonable to draw the conclusion that the number of statutes shows, first, that there is a real and accumulating problem and, secondly, that passing legislation does not seem to do much good. Furthermore, it seems to me that little attempt is being made to discover the causes, not of crime—they have been with us since time immemorial—but of the

acceleration or accumulation of problems over the past 20 to 25 years. The Government do not seem to do much about that. As far as I am aware, there is not much written about it in academia, and the newspaper pundits who write about the environment, foreign policy, economics, defence and so on say little about it. There is little questioning about what is wrong with society that makes us have to pass so much legislation. Perhaps I can briefly suggest a few questions that we may wish to ask, without perhaps knowing the answers.

Is one reason the effect of the economic revolution that occurred in the mid-1980s? Many people believe that the dominance of the market place and the cult of the consumer have brutalised much of our society and diluted obligations to the community. Could one cause be the decline of religion, especially Christianity? Christianity provided a moral framework and social cohesion, particularly in Wales.

Does the modern pursuit of inclusiveness—I have to be very careful now—make for an amoral society? If we are all living cheek by jowl in that big tent without core values, to label conduct as good or bad, or right or wrong is considered disruptive—indeed, the vogue word is "judgmental".

What contribution to drug and drug-related crimes has been made by the tolerance and, in some cases, acceptance of using drugs, both soft and hard, by some of the media establishment and the entertainment industry?

What contribution to sex and sex-related crimes has been made by the commercial and media exploitation of sex, especially by television, where sex provides an endless supply of programmes, boosting the earnings of presenters and producers?

What effect has a child-centred education system had on a sense of order, discipline and an awareness of right or wrong in our classrooms?

Again, I must be careful. What contribution to the behaviour of children has been made by the decline in the traditional family where both parents—or one parent in a single-parent family—are forced to go out to work, very often with wages subsidised by the state, and when the time to look after children, to listen to them while they grow up, to talk to them and read to them is obviously limited by the stress imposed by the duties on their parents or parent? No doubt other and better questions could be asked.

The Home Secretary spoke about vested interests. They are everywhere, but I suspect that the answers to some of those questions may be inconvenient to some vested interests in commerce, the media and perhaps even in sections of the bureaucracy. By all means let us be tough on crime and tough on the causes of crime, but let us try to find out what the causes are before we go down this road and slide further into a morass of ever more legislation.

5.43 pm

Mr. John Maples (Stratford-on-Avon): The right hon. Member for Llanelli (Denzil Davies) made some very interesting points. I hope that he will forgive me if I do not follow him down that line; I want to devote my eight minutes to the extradition Bill, which is fundamentally misconceived and seriously flawed. However, I agree that there is a need to reform extradition legislation, particularly in cases where terrorist suspects are sought.

The United States has been seeking the extradition of three people in connection with the east African embassy bombings for more than three and a half years. It took three years for their case to reach the Court of Appeal. As far as I know, they are still here, but that is not the worst case. The worst case is that of Rachid Ramda, whose extradition is sought by the French Government for the Paris bombings in 1995. He was arrested in November 1995. It took three and a half years for his case to reach the Court of Appeal. It then took the Home Secretary two years to deal with the order for his extradition. However, he is still here, on the seemingly entirely spurious ground that he cannot receive a fair trial in Paris as an Arab Muslim.

It is clear that the extradition procedure needs to be tightened, streamlined and speeded-up. The fault is not all with the courts, but I am amazed that, in the circumstances, the message has not got through to the Court of Appeal, the High Court and the House of Lords that such dilatoriness is not satisfactory—and I am also amazed that the message has not got through to the Home Office that such matters need to be dealt with more quickly.

I concede the need for this Bill, or a similar one. I concede that we need to limit the number of appeals and to tighten up the whole procedure so that we treat countries whose judicial systems we respect—and in which we think that people can get a fair trial—differently from those about which we have doubts. Currently, I think one can make about six appeals in the average extradition case. Under the proposals in the Bill, that would decrease to one, which seems sensible. The Bill goes far further than that, however. In the case of extradition to category 1 countries, it removes almost all the protections that our common and statue laws have built up over the years, and in the case of category 2 countries, it would remove some very important ones.

Three protections have been at the heart of our extradition legislation. Before we consider those, let us be sure about what we are considering: for the vast majority of the time, we are considering the extradition of British subjects for trial in foreign courts. The first of those protections is dual criminality—what one is accused of must be an offence in Britain as well as an offence in the country to which one's extradition is sought. Secondly, enough evidence must be presented to the British court before it orders extradition for it to be satisfied that there is a prima facie case to answer. Thirdly, there is the fall-back of the Home Secretary's discretion over whether to extradite someone—the fall-back of their elected Government deciding through one of their most senior Ministers whether to extradite them. Those rights and freedoms have been built up over a long period, and we should be careful before casually discarding them.

Part 1 of the Bill contains an extremely badly drafted list of offences, which carry no legal definition. What is racism or xenophobia, computer-related crime, or participation in a criminal organisation? Those are just three of a list of about 25 offences. That kind of drafting would not pass muster in an English criminal law statute, although, effectively, that is what it will become. It is incredibly vague, and it is subject to a great variety

[Mr. John Maples]

of interpretations. I do not see how xenophobia can be a crime, given that, as I understand it, it is a state of mind—although, apparently, one can be extradited for it. I shall refer later to what I regard as a hypothetical but nevertheless realistic example.

Secondly, in many continental jurisdictions, an investigating magistrate is entitled to arrest people for the purposes of his investigation. When does that right come into play? Somebody could be arrested on the say-so of a Greek or Spanish magistrate, and might spend a long time in jail while the crime or the offence is investigated. Many Members will have had constituents who have languished in Spanish or Greek jails—one of my constituents did so for a year and a half while awaiting trial on a relatively minor drugs offence. Before we put any of these provisions into operation, we must make sure that the countries to which faster-track extradition will take place have minimum juridical standards. For instance, if somebody is extradited, they should be charged within seven days, tried within three months, and an appeal must be made within a certain period. If the British plane spotters who returned from their holiday in Greece and were charged with espionage had been charged with terrorism, or a related offence, they would have had absolutely no defence against extradition. There would have been no way for them to stop the process of being extradited back to Greece.

At least non-scheduled offences, which are not on the list, require the rule of dual criminality. The prima facie rule does not apply to them, however, and the Home Secretary has no discretion with regard to them. In relation to category 2 countries, the situation is slightly better, as the prima facie and dual criminality rules are required, but the grounds on which the Secretary of State can resist extradition are very small and fall within a very tight definition of national security.

I shall give an example. One of the categories of offences for which automatic extradition applies is that of crimes coming within the jurisdiction of the International Criminal Court. The war that we conducted in Kosovo was considered by many legal authorities to be illegal, and I suspect that the Greek Government, who were heavily on the side of the Serbs in that conflict, would take that view. Were a Greek magistrate, on the complaint of a human rights organisation in Greece, to charge our Prime Minister, perhaps after he had left office, with criminal offences in connection with that, there would be no way under these proposals that that could be stopped. The Home Secretary must have a fall-back power to stop such wholly unrealistic activity.

What we saw in the Pinochet case—not many Labour Members sympathised with General Pinochet—*[Interruption.]* As my hon. Friend the Member for Buckingham (Mr. Bercow) says from a sedentary position, not many Conservative Members did either. What we saw, however, was an extremely dangerous precedent. We should not forget that the same thing might happen to a senior Minister in a British Government.

The legislation goes far too far. There is a problem and we need to reintroduce standards of dual criminality and provisions for a prima facie case and discretion for the Home Secretary. It is Parliament's job to protect the liberties of our citizens, in particular those liberties that have been built up over a long period. This is a case in which Parliament should stand up to the Government and make the Home Secretary think again. If we do that, we will have the vast majority of the press, the judges, lawyers, the House of Lords and public opinion and—dare I say it—justice on our side. I hope that enough Labour Members realise that they will find it very difficult to explain to a constituent why that person's child, wife or husband has been automatically extradited for something that is not an offence in the UK, for which no evidence was produced and for which there was no appeal to the Home Secretary. If extradition is automatic, people may languish in a foreign jail.

5.50 pm

Mrs. Anne Campbell (Cambridge): I am glad to be called because I particularly wish to speak about antisocial behaviour, which has badly affected some of my constituents in the past few months. If I have time, I also wish to talk about vagrancy and begging, which has always been an issue in my constituency.

In the summer, I received several complaints about a group of young children who were terrorising their neighbourhood. In fact, I met some of them on one of the regular visits that I make to the area. They were aged between about eight and 14, and the police tell me that none of them was involved with drink or drugs, but many of them truanted from school and some came from dysfunctional families.The group grew in size over the summer, particularly when the police were temporarily distracted by the tragic events in Soham. In passing, may I point out that I hope that if a request for additional funding is received, my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary will consider it sympathetically? The costs of Operation Fincham were excessive for a small police force such as that in Cambridgeshire.

By September, a group of 20 children, with a hard core of five or six, were involved in petty vandalism, arson, breaking windows and, in some cases, intimidating lone women and elderly people. I know that the people in the area were furious and turned out in large numbers to a police consultation meeting, which I also attended, in September. One woman told me how frightened she had been when a group of youths surrounded her car and made it impossible for her to get out and go into her house. She was rescued only because she happened to have a mobile phone with her and was able to summon help.

I discussed the situation with the police and they told me that the only way they could break this circle of behaviour was by involving other agencies, such as schools, housing associations and social services. Their first move was to get the children who were truanting back into school. The action that my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Estelle Morris) took, when she was Secretary of State for Education and Skills, to encourage the prosecution and imprisonment of parents who fail to send their children to school had a positive and beneficial effect. Although it did not directly affect parents in my constituency, it certainly made them realise that the Government were serious about getting children into school.

The second move that the police took was to try to involve the housing associations. In this area, three housing associations cover social housing and the police tried to obtain their co-operation in threatening eviction orders if parents did not bring their children under control. That has been difficult to achieve, because several housing associations were involved and some were more co-operative than others. It is probably true to say that the independent housing associations have not worked collectively as part of the problem-solving process.

Social services were also involved in offering advice and support to parents. Such a multi-agency approach is effective and could be more effective as trust builds between the police and the different agencies. For example, the police tell me that there is a great variation in the co-operation offered by secondary schools. Some of them are very co-operative and invite the police in, while others are much more suspicious. More co-operation between schools and the police would be beneficial in such circumstances. The situation is now much improved and the police have been successful. The children now attend school or, in some cases, a pupil referral unit where they can be given much closer attention than in a mainstream school.

Following the events in the summer, I paid a visit to my local youth offending service at the invitation of its director, Tom Jefford. He wanted me to see the effect of Government legislation and how effective it had been on changing the environment around young people's behaviour. He invited all his section heads to come to talk to me about the work that they were doing, and I was particularly moved by a young woman who was in charge of the lay panels that interview young offenders and monitor their behaviour. Children who have been involved in the vandalism of the sort that I have described are given a caution for the first offence. However, for their second and subsequent offences, they have to attend a meeting of the lay panel, which may include the victim of their antisocial behaviour. I gather that the national participation rate of victims in the lay panels is around 20 per cent., but in Cambridge it is nearer 80 per cent. I heard that the young offenders attending the panels are often visibly moved and distressed on hearing of the victim's experience. We do not know whether this will have a positive effect on the offending rate in the long term, but the signs are good. Young people begin to identify with the victim, start to understand the effect of their behaviour on other people and become more socially integrated. The youth offending team was optimistic about the effect that such measures will have.

The team also told me about the acceptable behaviour contracts that bind a young person to a set of rules that govern his or her behaviour. The panels usually monitor the contracts and hold the young people to account if their behaviour does not reach the required standards. All such measures have proved to be extremely positive and beneficial.

I also talked to several police officers. The community beat officers in the city told me of the changes that they would like to take place. On the rules for antisocial behaviour orders, I understand that, at present, it is not possible to write down positive behaviour points on the orders. They usually say that a young person must not do something, whereas the police would like to write down what the young people must do. That would present a much more positive image.

I have already discussed the problems of children as young as eight in my constituency, and their parents must become much more involved. They should know where their children are and should be able to discipline them properly. In some cases, parenting orders will help. However, sadly, in many dysfunctional families heroin or crack cocaine may be a problem for the parents, and serving parenting orders on them is unlikely to lead to an improvement in their behaviour.

I am pleased that my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary is introducing a Bill on these issues. It will certainly have my support.

5.58 pm

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate): Sadly, because of time, I will not be able to pursue the issues that the hon. Member for Cambridge (Mrs. Campbell) raised.

I want to focus on the anonymity of defendants in trials relating to sexual offences, and I was pleased that my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) placed such emphasis on the presumption of innocence and on the prosecution proving its case beyond reasonable doubt. I was reassured that the Home Secretary also endorsed the importance of those cardinal principles. However, if one's reputation is destroyed, it is of little consolation that one remains technically innocent. I hope that the House also paid attention to the Chairman of the Home Affairs Committee and to the report that he has published.

The Government addressed this issue in a White Paper and said:

> "We are minded to retain the existing format in regard to anonymity for defendants as no other category of offence is dealt with in this way. However, we are still prepared to listen to the arguments of those who feel strongly on the matter."

Of course the Government are still prepared to listen. That is the purpose of Parliament. However, I also hope that it means that they are prepared to be persuaded by the arguments of hon. Members who feel as strongly about this issue as I do.

Sex offences and the way in which we deal with sex in the United Kingdom provoke extremism and a hysteria peculiar to us. The atmosphere in which sex offences are considered is uniquely charged because of the press coverage of such cases. The recent history of our media bears that out. We have only to consider the press frenzy following the Burrell trial, the television presenter whom the press accused of rape, and the police officer in the Soham case—mentioned by the hon. Member for Cambridge—whose name appeared on a list from the United States, to realise that those people are convicted in the eyes of the nation before there is any question of a trial.

Those are national figures and their cases are known to us, but the local press causes just as much damage. In 1998, 700 people attended the funeral of a 31-year-old teacher in my constituency called Nick Drewett. He was a popular and committed teacher, but he took his life when faced with charges of behaving improperly with pupils in his care. The master who was charged with him was acquitted. A significant factor in his decision to commit suicide was the sensational publicity that attended the investigation of the charges.

[Mr. Crispin Blunt]

Nick Drewett is not alone. I presented a ten-minute Bill in 1999, which the NASUWT helped me to prepare. It gave me the statistic that between 1991 and 1998 there were 974 police investigations into abuse allegations against its members. No grounds were discovered for prosecution in 792 of those cases. The publicity in any one of those 80 per cent. of cases would do serious injustice to an innocent teacher.

My Bill attempted to protect teachers from injustice. I managed to convince my hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May), who was our Education spokesman, to include similar measures in our manifesto at the last election. However, the principle does not apply only to teachers; it goes wider than that. I was slightly concerned about the Home Secretary referring to the will of the people. The fourth estate frequently claims for itself the will of the people and that it operates on behalf of the will of the people.

In the last Parliament, the Government introduced advanced measures to help complainants in sex offence cases. They are listed on page 19 of the White Paper. Although in 1985, 25 per cent. of complaints about rape resulted in a conviction, by 2000 that figure had fallen to 7 per cent. So 93 per cent. of those people who have to defend themselves against such complaints are innocent. That is what the presumption of innocence means. I notice the expression on the faces of Labour Members, but people are innocent until they are proven guilty. We cannot allow reputations to be destroyed by the publicity that accompanies cases in which people are innocent.

The decision-making process in the prosecution of sex offence cases is uniquely tilted. As a result of the atmosphere surrounding such cases, there is a tendency to press on with them. When the Crown Prosecution Service or the police decide whether there is a complaint to answer, the sensitivity of such cases, especially those involving children and, I now believe, in the more general case of rape, the tendency is to proceed to prosecution.

Vera Baird: Is not the hon. Gentleman aware of the joint publication by the Crown Prosecution Service inspectorate and police inspectorate, which came to the opposite conclusion? Cases do not go on when they are difficult. Instead, they are stopped when there is the slightest difficulty. The hon. Gentleman needs to get his facts straight.

Mr. Blunt: How does the hon. and learned Lady explain the fact that the same number of people are being convicted 15 years later when the number of complainants has quadrupled? I have not read the document she mentions, and I will do so, but my experience—and no doubt that of others—and the statistics cast doubt on its conclusion. The tendency to continue with a case is more extreme if the complainant is a child, and the loss of reputation of the people concerned is also extreme. Such cases result in extreme and tragic consequences, such as my constituent's decision to end his life.

It was decided in 1998 to end the anonymity of defendants in such trials, but we have moved on from that. The White Paper gives an example of a practical difficulty. It states:

"if a man escaped custody before conviction, the police could not warn the public he was a suspected rapist unless the judge exercised his power to lift those restrictions."

That is a pretty thin practical justification for the measures. The judge is plainly able to lift restrictions if someone is thought to be a danger to the public, and he would be right to do so. The balance of the argument has changed since 1998.

Caroline Flint (Don Valley): I accept that the hon. Gentleman is raising some difficult issues. Although I would not support sensational accounts in the newspapers, by the same token does he agree that the public's awareness of a person who has been charged with rape or paedophilia has often led to other victims coming forward who might otherwise not have done so?

Mr. Blunt: I accept that sensational publicity around a case may encourage other people to complain, but there has to be a balance. The charges that are brought against people in such circumstances are serious. The public take them very seriously and the publicity that can result from people's names becoming known serves to destroy their reputations whether they are proved innocent or guilty. I believe that the balance of the argument has changed since the decision was taken in 1998 to remove anonymity from defendants.

Measures have been introduced to assist people who complain about such crimes to give evidence. They are protected from a defendant cross-examining them in court and there are powers to enable complaints to be made. We must properly balance those measures, especially in the light of the atmosphere that our media create around such cases, by giving defendants the anonymity to which they are entitled, in what is a unique set of circumstances, until they are convicted and found guilty of the crime. If we do not do that, the presumption of innocence amounts to mere words for the people who are on the receiving end of such allegations.

6.8 pm

Mr. Tom Clarke (Coatbridge and Chryston): I trust that the hon. Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt) and the House will forgive me if I do not cover the points that he raised, because I want to concentrate on the important issue of the misuse of drugs. I am pleased that it is covered in the Queen's Speech, which I welcome.

The misuse of drugs is at the heart of the Government's strategy on social deprivation, health, environment and the quality of life of our constituents. People in my constituency would expect me to say that they share my opinion that the problem is serious. There is barely a family or a street that has not experienced the trauma that arises from drug addiction. Of course, those people expect the House and the Government to address their concerns.

The objectives in the Queen's Speech, including economic growth, an improved environment, a better quality of life for our people and investment in public services such as education and transport, are very noble and welcome, and so too is the regeneration of our

towns and cities. Hanging over those noble objectives, however, is a big cloud in the shape of drug misuse. If that is an aspect of globalisation—and I believe that it is—it is right that we act both domestically and internationally. In the short time available to me I should like to make some points which I trust are relevant.

We should be seen to be tackling the problem along all parts of the chain, acting over the long term domestically and internationally. It is my firm belief that the sophisticated and complex nature of drugs issues requires the Government to be equally sophisticated and nuanced in their approach. Joined-up government is essential and must be to the fore, involving almost every Department in facing this serious challenge.

I am glad that the Queen's Speech refers to measures to deal with drug trafficking. Customs and Excise employees are important in that. I want to put on the record a point about those personnel, and I should perhaps declare my interest as a former civil servant and union activist. In 2000–01, we employed 22,803 people in those posts, and at 22,854 the figure for 2001–02 is hardly different. I am not alone in thinking that, with millions of people coming into the country and billions of tonnes of freight arriving, that is inadequate. There is a case for increasing Customs' number, and I believe that that would be effective.

I say that because, domestic though this problem is, it would hardly arise were it not for the fact that drugs are arriving here from other parts of the world. In the past year or so, the House has rightly spent a great deal of time dealing with Afghanistan, and we were reminded that over 90 per cent. of heroin on the streets of Britain comes from that country. I encourage the Government to continue their observation of what is happening in Afghanistan; to bear in mind what is taking place in other developing countries; to do their utmost to discourage the production and export of heroin; and to offer other job opportunities to those who are tempted to become involved.

At home, I want to deal with demography and with the environment and its impact on those sad, and very often lonely, people who are tempted to use and deal drugs. The use of hard drugs is far more prevalent among the unemployed than among the employed, and in a constituency such as mine, where in many places there is serious deprivation, that fact has to be borne in mind. We simply do not see the bigger picture. Do employment programmes in such deprived neighbourhoods take account of that? I am not sure that they always do.

Treatment, which has been mentioned, often focuses on drugs per se, but should we not also take on board wider issues, including obvious social exclusion? Drug misuse is not merely about statistics, important though they are; it is about people and families. We all see in our surgeries and elsewhere people who are traumatised by the antisocial activities of others or, sadly, by their discovery that young people in their own families, including well-educated young people who have been to college or university, have succumbed to the menace of drugs. I want to put an end to that and to the revolving-door syndrome whereby people move between institutions and hospitals without a solution to the problem. Prison has been mentioned. I have taken the view since I came to the House that we send far too many people to prison, and certainly too many who are mentally ill or have learning disabilities. To add the issue of drugs, without addressing it, is mistaken.

I thank the House for listening. I welcome the inclusion of this serious issue in the Queen's Speech, and I hope that we can return to it when legislation comes before the House.

6.16 pm

Sandra Gidley (Romsey): The biggest law and order problem in my constituency is antisocial behaviour. I was tempted to spend my eight minutes talking about that, but as we have not yet seen any proposals on it, it would be difficult to comment constructively.

I want to pick up on something that my hon. Friend the Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes) said. It is clear that when communities start to work together to tackle antisocial behaviour, and members of the public become actively involved in working with agencies, positive steps are taken. However, there are parts of my constituency where people are still frightened to come forward because they think that there will be retribution if they get involved. Whatever the legislation says, we need to find a way of making sure that communities feel safe to work together.

I want to concentrate my remarks on the proposed legislation to deal with sex offenders. I welcome the document that was published yesterday and many of its proposals, including, in particular, the special protection for children and the most vulnerable in our society and the new crime of grooming. However, I make no apologies for spending most of my time talking about something that is not of immediate interest to the vast majority of my constituents because it is a hidden problem.

Yesterday I asked a question about sex tourism, and I was heartened by the Home Secretary's positive response. I hope that the forthcoming Bill will provide an opportunity to tackle this problem on a global scale. I first came face to face with it when I visited Cambodia. The visit was arranged by a non-governmental organisation, World Vision, but I had the opportunity to work with and speak to many other NGOs in this field.

While I was in Cambodia I met some of the girls who had been most affected by sex tourism. I visited a centre that rescued young girls from brothels, and I remember a young child who was so tiny that I could only assume that she was the daughter of one of the workers. The child was eight and had been sexually exploited. Her image will remain with me all my life. On a more positive note, I saw a great deal of work, including peer education projects and education for communities to help them try to understand the problem. On a lighter note, I also visited some of the brothel areas. It occurred to me that that was one occasion on which it was helpful to be a woman MP, because when I rang home and said, "I'm visiting the brothel area tonight," people were not unduly worried.

Cambodia is not yet a mainstream tourist destination, but the temple of Angkor Wat was recently voted one of the 50 top places to visit before one dies. Evidence is already emerging of the sex tourism problem, which has been highlighted in a document called, "Children's

[Sandra Gidley]

Work, Adults' Play". In that publication, European men, many of them British, feature among the top five groups of users of what can only be regarded as under-age sex services. Places such as Cambodia and Bangkok are high on the list of people who are increasingly forced to go abroad to obtain their peculiar sexual kicks.

Cambodia's Ministry of Planning estimated that the country has 30,000 prostitutes under 18, its legal age of consent, with over 5,000 young girls in Phnom Penh. Worldwide, it is estimated that 1 million children are new victims of sexual exploitation every year—most of us will find it difficult to get our head round that figure. A lot of prostitution is prompted by poverty, so we must put in place alternatives for young girls who decide that they have no other option in life. I spoke to one young woman—she was 15—who had been rescued from a brothel, but had got used to the lifestyle and liked having money. There was no immediate alternative for her, so attempts need to be made to retrain girls with other skills so that they are not forced down that route again.

Many countries are doing their best to tackle the problems internally, while some poor countries may need the help of the international community. But the paedophile is a cunning beast and will seek other ways of getting his kicks. There is a weakness internationally, and we have to be one step ahead of the problem.

The Government could do a few things in the short term before the forthcoming Bill is introduced. First, when will they ratify the optional protocol—on the sale of children, child prostitution and child pornography—to the United Nations convention on the rights of the child? Secondly, France and Austria have taken the step of installing their own police in their embassies in Cambodia and possibly elsewhere so that they can better monitor incoming nationals. I hope that the Home Secretary will look at the benefits of the United Kingdom doing that, as it is a positive and practical measure that may deter people from seeking their kicks abroad since they will know that society is one step ahead of them.

There are also problems in the expatriate community. I do not want to distort the issue, as the problems do not all stem from tourism. A large number of people go abroad to work—it is easy to get a job as a teacher, for example. Because there are no police checks and their salary is comparatively high they can employ young girls, ostensibly as maids, and abuse them. Again, there must be international police checks so that when people move from country to country, we are one step ahead of them. My understanding is that known sex offenders do not have to register their travel destination for short visits. I give the Government credit for the Sex Offenders (Notice Requirements) (Foreign Travel) Regulations 2001, which compelled outbound offenders to register, but only for visits of eight days or more. Clearly, quite a lot of abuse can happen in eight days. Communities in different countries must work together to tackle that problem and while we have an opportunity to do something here, we should take the lead.

6.23 pm

Mr. Eric Illsley (Barnsley, Central): I welcome many of the Bills in the Queen's Speech, particularly those on home affairs, including the criminal justice Bill and measures on tackling antisocial behaviour and sex offences. I wholly endorse the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin).

On criminal justice, the public perception is of rising crime and a lack of police response. The other day, when meeting members of the South Yorkshire branch of the Police Federation, I was told by one that he had been on duty and had received a call from a young woman in distress who wanted a visit from a police officer. She was 137th on his list of calls to be made that day. He said that it was hours before he could attend to that incident. There is therefore a problem concerning the lack of police response to the public's calls. There is also a perception that the punishment does not fit the crime, so I welcome new measures on sentencing. I have previously raised in the House the issue of Crown Prosecution Service cases being dropped before they get to court or while the court case is proceeding as a result of lack of evidence. I have also spoken about the failure of the public interest: members of the public are simply not informed of the collapse of those trials.

I welcome initiatives on victim and witness support, especially the latter. In my constituency, a witness refused to give evidence in trial because he was sitting opposite the defendant while waiting to go into court. For want of a better expression, he simply lost his bottle or received threats from the defendant. He thought that discretion was the better part of valour, left the courthouse and would not give evidence. I therefore welcome the proposals that witnesses will be given support.

I also welcome the measures on antisocial behaviour, which will be debated at length in the House. Antisocial behaviour is a major concern in my constituency, as in other constituencies where people suffer from antisocial acts, graffiti and vandalism. In districts throughout the borough of Barnsley, youths congregate and instil fear into the local populations, even though they are not committing a crime. There is simply a perception among local people that they cannot walk down the street or get past those gangs of youths without being assaulted. I fully endorse what my hon. Friend the Member for Sunderland, South said about the problem of antisocial tenants. Some private landlords take advantage of a system in which housing benefit is paid directly to them rather than the tenant—we must take a look at that. In my constituency, a landlord who lives in the midlands refuses to visit a property where problems have arisen. The property is tenanted by a young woman who is not committing any crime, but her boyfriend is a known drugs offender in the area, and the police are finding it difficult to deal with the situation. The boyfriend is making the lives of the surrounding neighbours pure hell. He is a known offender and is wanted for drug and firearm offences. Obviously, local people are afraid.

I endorse comments made today about the need to look at problems caused by air weapons and fireworks. There is a fear in my constituency that fireworks are used as a signalling mechanism, especially among drug dealers. Quite apart from that, fireworks are used throughout the year. They are loud and noisy. At best they are a distraction and nuisance; at worst they are used as weapons and devices to blow up telephone boxes and destroy property. We need more than a code of practice. The time has come to look at introducing a

legislative measure to restrict the sale and power of fireworks. The problem is getting out of hand and is one of the biggest issues in my postbag at the moment. Similarly, there has been a rash of incidents involving air weapons. I believe that there has been a fatality in the north-east, so the time has come for us to consider the problem carefully.

Although they are no longer part of the home affairs brief, I welcome the measures on alcohol licensing. I declare an interest as honorary adviser to the Northern Licensed Victuallers Association, and very much welcome the reforms in the alcohol and entertainment licensing Bill, especially the deregulation of opening hours. I do not believe that we will get 24-hour licensing in every pub throughout the country, and I do not believe that we would want that, but we can have some sensible relaxation of the law in relation to licensing. The portable licence is to be welcomed, as is the proposal to license the licensee as opposed to the premises. Licensing is not really a judicial function, and it can easily be transferred to a committee of magistrates, much as taxi drivers and others are licensed, as a local authority function.

The relaxation of licensing laws might reduce the antisocial behaviour that occurs at turning-out times, and the problems that the police have to deal with at certain times of the evening. That is well documented in the press, in journals and so on. When we consider alcohol licensing, we should examine the discounting schemes used by pubs and companies. In my area, pubs are a growth industry, and there are numerous applications for licences. We already have far too many public houses. The only way for them to attract a limited market is to offer tickets at £10 entry, which entitles people to drink as much as they like, or to offer two or three drinks for the price of one. Such schemes are leading to problems of drunkenness and disorder. I hope that licensing deregulation will address that.

6.31 pm

Lady Hermon (North Down): I am taken aback at being called to speak. I owe an apology to all the hon. Members in the Chamber. As the Deputy Speaker knows, I had to leave the Chamber to attend a Standing Committee, so I appreciate being called so promptly, and I appreciate the forbearance of other hon. Members, who may have been present this afternoon while I was not.

There is much that the Ulster Unionist party welcomes in the Gracious Speech, particularly the proposals to deal with antisocial behaviour. I noticed that it is the Government's intention to deal with antisocial behaviour throughout the United Kingdom. At our last Home Affairs Question Time, I pointed out to the Home Secretary that while hon. Members criticise the number of antisocial behaviour orders that have been made in Great Britain, no such orders are available to the police or local councils in Northern Ireland. If the Government are committed to dealing with antisocial behaviour throughout the whole of the United Kingdom, will they please bear it in mind that we in Northern Ireland would love antisocial behaviour orders to be available there?

I was especially pleased to see that the Government intend to increase sentences for those involved in sex crimes, particularly against women and against children. In that regard, I draw the Minister's attention to a loophole that currently exists in Northern Ireland. We are the only part of the United Kingdom that shares a land frontier with another European Union country, the Republic of Ireland. I have a constituent, a young lady, whose daughter, a very young child, was taken by her mother's brother on an outing, ostensibly to Dublin, to Butlins, and was raped in the Republic of Ireland.

The man was duly convicted in the Republic of Ireland and sentenced to 10 years' imprisonment. However, he was transferred to a prison in Northern Ireland, on the ground that he wished to be near his family, without members of his family being aware that he had been transferred. He had been included on the sex offenders register in the Republic of Ireland, but he is not included on the sex offenders register in Northern Ireland, so when he becomes free, he can reappear in my constituency. My constituent, and particularly her daughter, are very fearful of that man coming anywhere near them. That loophole needs to be cleared up.

The Ulster Unionist party expects Northern Ireland to be included in all the measures that are introduced to modernise and streamline the criminal justice system. We had an extensive review of criminal justice as part of the Belfast agreement, and many new institutions were developed through the Justice (Northern Ireland) Act 2002, which has been on the statute book since July. There was a major shake-up of the criminal justice system in Northern Ireland. We lead the way in the reform of policing, in human rights and in criminal justice.

I commend to the Minister one of the changes that was introduced—the judicial appointments commission, a body that has been set up to appoint all but the most senior members of the judiciary. That gives an enhanced sense of accountability and transparency to those who sit on the Bench. The commission is designed to be representative of the community. Community involvement in judicial appointments is helpful to the judicial system.

I was pleased to see the references to international co-operation, given that Northern Ireland shares a land frontier with another EU member state. We suffer greatly in Northern Ireland, as does the Treasury, from cross-border smuggling. The Minister of State in the Northern Ireland Office with responsibility for security has just returned from a useful trip to study cross-border co-operation between Canada and the United States of America in dealing with cross-border smuggling.

I hope that in the spirit of co-operation, the Government will make representations to ensure that the Irish Government, on passing their new extradition measures, will give sufficient powers to police forces in the United Kingdom to execute arrest warrants in that jurisdiction. That would be invaluable in countering those who are involved in cross-border smuggling. As the Minister will appreciate, the smuggling of fuel and cigarettes is used by paramilitary organisations, both loyalist and republican, to fund their paramilitary activities. Any co-operation between police forces in the Republic of Ireland and the United Kingdom would be welcomed to clamp down on such activity.

I thank the Deputy Speaker again, and leave those points with the Minister, in the hope that he will incorporate them in future legislation.

6.38 pm

Mr. Bill Tynan (Hamilton, South): I welcome the Queen's Speech. Reading the debates on the Gracious Speech in June 2001, I was struck by how much the Labour Government have achieved over the past year, and how little the rhetoric from the Opposition Benches has changed.

I am delighted with the focus on justice for victims of crime and antisocial behaviour. That is important to my constituents in Hamilton, South. Dealing with crime is a devolved matter for Scotland. Because of the need for United Kingdom-wide solutions, we have an opportunity for real partnership between Westminster, the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly. By tackling poverty, we are improving social inclusion, enhancing benefits and tax credits, and increasing employment opportunities. If we do not do that, we will not eradicate the crime that exists in many of our communities.

Crime and disorder is a UK-wide problem, but the Government have taken significant steps to deal with it. The Home Secretary admits that we have not solved the problems. The measures proposed by the Government are an opportunity to further advance the improvement in our communities that we all desire. I do not believe that it is a failure that each of the measures that we have introduced has built on the successful implementation of previous law. We have been building measures in a sensible way, seeing what works and listening to what communities are saying, particularly about what has to be done to solve the problem of antisocial behaviour and deal with that blight on our lives. I agree entirely with my right hon. Friend the Member for Hamilton, North and Bellshill (Dr. Reid) that pressure for action on antisocial behaviour is generally coming from the grass roots. We must take cognisance of that fact.

In the middle of Hamilton, we still have a problem regarding the yob culture. The same problem is endemic in many of our constituencies. My hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, Central (Mr. Illsley) spoke about fireworks, which are topical. Local communities face considerable harassment and nuisance from children who regard fireworks as some sort of toy and apparently find enjoyment in putting them in pillar boxes or letter boxes. While an elderly lady in my constituency was waiting for an ambulance to take her to hospital, a rocket was put into to her letter box and lit. It hit the back of the hall. The trauma for that person, who was waiting to go into hospital, was substantial.

I should like to consider some solutions to the problems that we face. In Hamilton, South, we introduced a successful pilot scheme as part of our child safety initiative in which young children aged 12 and under who were out late at night after a certain time were collected by the police and taken back to their homes. Their parents were held responsible for correcting the problem. Unfortunately, the amount of policing time involved makes such an approach untenable in the long term, as police had to be moved from one area to another in order to make the scheme successful.

My hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, Central spoke about the 137th item on a list of calls. I should like to draw attention to a pilot scheme that is in operation in Hamilton, South in which a dedicated call centre has been set up and four experienced police officers work on a shift rota to take and screen the calls. Callers often report that a car has been broken into and that the police force cannot do any reparatory or investigatory work. Those taking the calls can advise the caller, perhaps saying "You don't really need a police officer; this is what can be done."

Working in partnership with the likes of South Lanarkshire council, with which the police have a good relationship, those involved in the scheme have been able to deal with many of the problems that arise. When yobs are constantly causing problems in an area, the problems are highlighted and it is possible to ensure that the callers understand how to deal with them. If a problem relates to yobs in a drunken rabble, the police can look to the licensed retail outlets in that area in order to deal with it. The scheme is a good example of joined-up thinking involving the local council, the police and other bodies working together not only to be proactive, but to look in the long term at how best they can deal with the problems in their area and eradicate their causes. That is certainly a way forward.

Having outlined some of the problems that the Queen's Speech seeks to tackle and local initiatives that are working, I should like to express my welcome of the proposals and suggest a number of others. If the revised antisocial behaviour orders are used wisely, they can have a genuine impact. In my constituency, we set up an antisocial behaviour unit and found that it could make a difference in tackling problems in particular areas. Where people felt previously that they were in a hopeless situation, taking evidence and ensuring that families were taking responsibility for their children worked well and enabled us to prevent the problems from escalating out of control.

Another problem is young kids who are out of school during the day, especially in the afternoon. That is a problem not only of policing, but of education and trading standards. It is also a council issue. Those involved have to work together in particular to ensure that those young children are not involving themselves with alcoholic beverages because of peer pressure.

Last night, I welcomed to Westminster the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities fireworks task group, which has considered the problem of fireworks for the past six months. Some 22 local authorities have given evidence, along with the police. The group has made a number of recommendations that I would recommend to the Home Office for its consideration. Misuse of fireworks is one of the biggest problems that we face. Unless we deal with it, it will continue to escalate out of control. The group said that health and safety is one of the big issues and recommended that the retailers who are selling fireworks should be made responsible and that the law should be tightened to prevent fireworks from falling into the hands of young people.

I congratulate the Government on introducing a range of important measures, but crime and antisocial behaviour are not easy issues to solve. The best way for us to deal with them is to ensure that we exert pressure as Members of Parliament, consider the issues and deal with the problems.

6.46 pm

Mr. Boris Johnson (Henley): I am very grateful for the chance to speak in this debate. I realise that at this stage in our proceedings, it is likely that a great many excellent points will already have been made, so I hope the House will forgive me if I reiterate a couple of those points, and especially those made by my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Maples) about the European arrest warrant, which is potentially very alarming indeed.

Let me give another example of why the warrant might go wrong. Let us imagine that a journalist is responsible for the production of some virulent anti-Welsh rhetoric of the sort that A. A. Gill produced not so long ago in *The Sunday Times*—I would not dream of repeating what he said, fond as I am of the Welsh, having contested a Welsh seat in 1997. The article might well be reprinted in a Spanish newspaper or read in an English newspaper on the Costa del Sol by a Welshman. It would then be possible under the laws of Spain to extradite the journalist to Spain for the crime of xenophobia against the Welsh.

Mr. Jon Owen Jones (Cardiff, Central): Hear, hear.

Mr. Johnson: I hear cheers of approval on the Labour Benches, but I do not think that that would be the right approach. It would be absurd. Even if my example seems frivolous, the problem that it illustrates is very far from frivolous. Two criminal systems cannot operate effectively in the same territory. The people of this country should be governed by the laws of this country. I say that not necessarily because I have any objection to the laws of any other country, but because the people of this country cannot vote out of office the legislators of Spain and did not elect them or give their approval to the laws under which A. A. Gill would be arraigned in my hypothesis. No matter how good the law might be, the approach is fundamentally undemocratic and alarming.

I am also alarmed by proposals to reform aspects of the criminal justice system. I do not quite understand why it is necessary to change the law on double jeopardy, which has protected citizens since the 12th century, as far as I can remember. We are told in the White Paper that the necessity arises from the tragic failure of the prosecution of the alleged culprits in the Stephen Lawrence affair, but as I think the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes) pointed out, there is no earthly prospect of a fair retrial of those culprits. It is therefore nonsensical and illogical to introduce a change in the law on double jeopardy on that basis. Abolishing the rule against double jeopardy is a considerable potential extension of the power of the state to oppress the individual and could encourage the police and the Crown Prosecution Service to be less than diligent in preparing cases in the knowledge that they can always have a second bite at the cherry.

Speeches throughout the afternoon have made it clear that hon. Members of all parties are united in their desire to reduce crime, especially violent crime, and in their consciousness that the threat of crime eats away people's confidence and security.

The genuine deterrent to crime is not elaborate and possibly illiberal reform of the criminal justice system but helping police to catch criminals. To that end, the Government would be better advised not to monkey around with laws that have existed since the 12th century, but to consider methods of alleviating the bureaucracy that oppresses the police and that they use all too often as an excuse for not doing the job as effectively as they might.

I want to speak briefly about the problem of rural crime in my constituency, and people's genuine fear that the police will not come to help them. When people ring, the police say that they do not have sufficient numbers to attend the scene of the crime. The other day, a farmer rang the police to say that there were burglars in his barn. The police said that they did not have the numbers to attend, so the farmer rang back to say that he had shot the burglars. At that point, the police attended the scene.

There are too few police on the beat in south Oxfordshire. My constituents also face the problem of magistrates courts closures. Henley magistrates court was closed three years ago, and Thame magistrates court has subsequently been closed. No adequate reason has been given for that. I suspect that the demon of property prices in the area lurks somewhere at the bottom of the matter. Consequently, witnesses have to drive for a considerable distance, sometimes for more than an hour, to testify. That is a deterrent and leads to the possibility of delay and the collapse of cases. There is also a problem for local newspapers, which are unable to report the cases.

My hon. Friend the Member for Reigate (Mr. Blunt) attacked the fourth estate for causing hysteria. I want to make a brief defence of newspapers, which play an important role in our criminal justice system through alerting the public to what is happening and to cases that come before the courts. In recent months, it has been impossible for the *Henley Standard*—a great newspaper for which, I should declare, I write a column, unpaid—to receive advance warning of cases. They used to get them when cases appeared before Henley magistrates court and Thame magistrates court, but they receive no warning from Oxford of the cases that are coming up. That is absurd. Justice is a public matter. It should be a utensil of public shame, and the newspaper has a vital role in that.

Dr. Andrew Murrison (Westbury): Like my hon. Friend, I have a magistrates court—Trowbridge—that is threatened. Does he agree that it is shameful for Ministers to try to hide behind magistrates courts committees and blame them for closures when Lord Justice Auld made it clear that responsibility lay with Ministers?

Mr. Johnson: I agree. The Government cannot evade responsibility. The Lord Chancellor recently tried to do that with the immortal declaration that he was all in favour of local justice but did not necessarily believe that it had to be administered locally.

Mr. Blunt: My hon. Friend referred to my "attack" on the fourth estate. I agree that justice must be public and that newspapers have a proper role to play. However, my point was to do with the way in which newspapers

[Mr. Bhatt]

deal with sexual crime. I believe that there is a case for anonymity for the defendant when that is granted to the complainant.

Mr. Johnson: I agree 100 per cent. with my hon. Friend. I simply wanted to show that I had listened attentively to his comments. I impute to him no disrespect for the *Henley Standard* and other local papers.

I want to refer briefly to the interesting contribution of the right hon. Member for Llanelli (Denzil Davies), who is no longer in his place. He asked whether we were genuinely tackling the big issues. There are six Bills that are supposed to solve the problem of crime in this country to consider. The right hon. Gentleman asked good questions about parental authority, the collapse of the family and education, which the hon. Member for Hamilton, South (Mr. Tynan) also mentioned. I agree that those are the main questions.

There is a nexus of problems that centres around children who go through school without showing respect to their teachers because they have no reason to show respect to their parents. Unless we begin to deal with the collapse of respect for authority, we will not begin to tackle the deep causes of crime. That may be a pompous thing to say, but one is entitled to be pompous in politics. It would be good if all hon. Members agreed that the collapse and loss of respect was the central problem for British politics and we all had the courage to say so from time to time.

6.55 pm

Vera Baird (Redcar): I shall spend all my eight minutes on one issue, just as I used to spend all my pocket money on one toy every Friday, but the issue is not to be toyed with: it is jury trial.

What are the virtues of jury trial? First, it is democratic. Society suffers from crime and pays for its effects and for the incarceration of those convicted by the courts. Society should therefore be represented in the system that determines guilt or innocence.

Juries make better decisions. Twelve jurors have a breadth of experience and insight that no judge—indeed, no individual—could hope to match. They cancel out each other's prejudices and they have the advantage, which a judge who makes a decision alone does not share, of debate.

Juries are free from any suggestion that they are pro-prosecution or pro-defence; their independence is uncompromised. Trial judges, however, are selected. I do not know who selects them, but however much a judge tries to be impartial, it will not prevent public misgiving about a tribunal being less than independent.

Let us consider the way in which judges are selected. They do not simply appear out of the ether to try specific cases; they are put in place, and there are some interesting anecdotes about that. The trial of the Archer One was mentioned a short time ago. Hon. Members will recall that it was conducted against the background of a libel trial in which the defendant's wife had given evidence, been called "fragrant" and provided important support for him. Gossip around the Bar, of which I was formerly a more active member, suggested that the defendant would act in the same way: he would not give evidence but get his wife to do so. The trial judge was subsequently announced. I shall not name him, but he is the greatest misogynist who has ever belonged to the judiciary of England and Wales. It was plain that he had been put in place by someone who had the power to do that to prevent a recurrence of events at the previous trial.

That information will not help Jeffrey Archer, even if he is told about it, because the jury, not the judge, makes the decision. However, the judge sets the framework, and selecting a judge to try a case is not an open process. If I were offered trial by judge instead of trial by jury, my first question would be, "Which judge?"

The critical issue in most trials is the honesty and reliability of witnesses. The standards that should apply to both tests are those of ordinary members of society. Full-time judges do not qualify as that because of their background, training and the lives that they lead.

Who will opt for trial by judge? Judges will not try a cross-section of cases. They will have a diet of appalling sex cases because the defendants will believe that a jury cannot overcome its prejudices when making a decision. Unattractive, upper-middle-class fraudsters will believe that they might be better off with someone who broadly derives from their social segment rather than with a jury that comprises a cross-section of people. Cases in which defence lawyers hope for a technical victory in the court of trial or on appeal because of possible defects in the reasoned judgment would also probably be tried by a judge instead of a jury.

Allowing such opportunistic incursions into the fairest form of trial—that by jury—goes in the opposite direction from all other Government policies and risks bringing the law into disrepute. For the public at large, the perception is likely to be that some defendants can avoid justice by removing juries—the guardians of our democratic values—from the decision-making process.

I have a profound anxiety that, if we have the ability to elect trial by judge alone, it might not seem such a great variation, at some later date, to relocate the right to elect trial by jury to the judge and away from the defendant. The proposed change would pave the way for a future Home Secretary completely to remove the right to a jury trial, leaving it as a form of trial available only at the discretion of a judge at a directions hearing, which is an appalling prospect.

This argument reaches its height in the context of serious and complex fraud trials. The White Paper refers to a small number of serious and complex trials lasting six months or so, which highlight—it does not say how—the difficulties of jury trial. The Serious Fraud Office prosecutes such serious and complex fraud trials. Between 1988 and 1991, there was a 63.6 per cent. conviction—that is, success—rate; between 1999 and 2002, the conviction rate was 86 per cent. Those rates are both higher than average and are on an upward trend. Juries brought about those convictions. If the cases were so complex that the convictions were brought about by incomprehension and were therefore wrongful convictions, it is a surprise that there have been so few appeals.

It is the job of the lawyer to outline and present to the lay jury the evidence of the offences. Complex and unfamiliar medical or forensic evidence has to be given in wounding trials and rape trials; psychological and psychiatric evidence in murder trials may be crucial in distinguishing between murder and manslaughter, between life imprisonment and probation. I have been involved in trials with five or six psychiatric reports in them, and technical and scientific evidence about tissues, fibres and DNA can be relevant to every level of crime. In all cases, it is the job of the lawyer to convey to members of the jury sufficient information to allow them to follow the case.

The public explanation of the charges performs the further important task of ensuring that members of the public and the press also understand the nature of the case. The jury not only represents the public at the trial; its presence ensures a comprehensible exposition of the case. The assumption seems to be, however, that some cases are so complex that only experts are capable of understanding the allegations, and that, consequently, there can be no public explanation that is comprehensible to the layman. The trial is then reduced to exchanges between lawyers and the judge, probably in impenetrable jargon, and occasionally falling into Latin. The tribunal will then pronounce to the public that, as a result of its proceedings, which neither the public nor the press have been expected to follow, it has concluded on the guilt or innocence of the accused. I do not believe that the public would, or should, be satisfied with a criminal justice system in which people are at risk of long sentences of imprisonment following trials in which the state has admitted that it cannot make its evidence comprehensible to the public.

There are many defects in the criminal justice system, to which the Home Secretary referred. It is slow, cumbersome, inefficient, unco-ordinated, at times chaotic, and intractably unwilling to be changed. Change it! If I had a hundred minutes, I could tell the House a hundred ways in which it could and should be changed, but I can make no link between the need for change and the proposal to curtail jury trial. We should be proud of trial by jury: please, leave it alone.

7.3 pm

Patrick Mercer (Newark): I am privileged to follow the hon. and learned Member for Redcar (Vera Baird), and I would like to associate myself with the comments of the hon. Members for Barnsley, Central (Mr. Illsley) and for Hamilton, South (Mr. Tynan) about fireworks, which have recently been causing all sorts of grief in Newark and Retford. I thoroughly agree with the their comments about them.

I would like to spend my eight minutes underlining the comments made by my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) about the need for effective legislation on community policing. I want to concentrate entirely on my constituency, which is not a typical inner-city constituency but a mixture of market towns and rural areas. It is an area that should be a fairly quiet part of north-east Nottinghamshire, yet it suffers in a special way. Nottinghamshire has seen a rise in crime of some 2 per cent. over the last year, but, more worryingly, robberies have gone up by 54 per cent., sexual offences by 4 per cent., offences of violence against the person by 8 per cent.—and so it goes on.

The hot spot in Nottinghamshire is not Newark, Retford or Tuxford but Nottingham, and, of course, that is where the chief constable has to put his resources. Those resources are extremely limited, and I shall come back to that in a moment. We have already heard in other debates from the hon. Member for Nottingham, North (Mr. Allen)—I suspect that the hon. Members for Gedling (Vernon Coaker) and for Bassetlaw (John Mann) would agree with him—that all these areas are being stripped of their officers and resources so as to concentrate on the big problem, namely, Nottingham. Before I move on, I would like to pay tribute to the amount of work that the hon. Member for Bassetlaw has done on the drugs problem in north-east Nottinghamshire. That issue certainly touches my constituency and I am grateful for the exposure that he has ensured for the matter.

The problem in Nottinghamshire revolves around police funding. We are told that there is to be an extra £3.3 million for Nottinghamshire constabulary, and I am sure that there is. That will represent a 2.5 per cent. increase, which in real terms is not an increase at all. Nottinghamshire constabulary faces the same level of difficulty and reported crime as Merseyside, yet the number of officers on the beat is several hundred short of the number in Merseyside. To overcome this lack of funding, the chief constable has had no alternative but to step up the police precept in the council tax, which has risen by almost 20 per cent. in the last year. That has deeply irritated my constituents.

Despite that rise in taxation—and perhaps because there is no real additional central Government funding—the lack of policemen in my constituency is quite remarkable. I am told that, since March last year, an extra 55 officers have been available in Nottinghamshire. I am sure that that is so, but they are not to be seen in Newark, where we have gone from 42 officers to 29. When those numbers are divided into shifts, and when the new response system that the chief constable has introduced is brought into play, there are times when we have only two officers on duty to ensure that the town remains relatively law abiding.

In addition, the number of our special constables has fallen, and I have also been told that we are not going to receive any community support officers. I attended a recent meeting of Newark Business Club, at which we were told that if we wanted extra community support officers we would have to fund them ourselves at a cost of £20,000 a year per officer. Additionally, with the new systems that have been introduced to centralise response times, further officers have gone from Newark. We now get response vehicles only from 12 miles away, in Ollerton. It has been said before that Newark has been "hollowed out" of its officers and its resources.

The Prime Minister has never visited my constituency, and when the Home Secretary came to Nottinghamshire we were not, strangely enough, on the list. Perhaps they did not want to see that the streets were pretty well unpatrolled, or that it can sometimes take 40 minutes to get a response on the telephone from the police. Interestingly, the striking firemen whom I visited recently in Newark said that one of their problems was that they were having not only to act as paramedics at the scenes of accidents but, with the lack of police officers in the area, to become de facto policemen themselves.

[Patrick Mercer]

Even more worryingly—I make no comment on the rights or wrongs of this—a number of police officers have complained anonymously through the pages of the *Newark Advertiser* about the way in which their constabulary is run. This illustrates the completely unacceptable lack of confidence that has spread through the constabulary, which is being communicated to my constituents every day.

What are the solutions? I challenge the Minister and the Home Secretary to visit Newark to see what it is like and how community policing has broken down completely in that part of north-east Nottinghamshire. If the Minister doubts the effect of that and how seriously my constituents take it, let him look at the general election result in the constituency. The grievance is very deeply felt.

When the regional inspector of constabulary visits in January, I ask that he consider particularly carefully the system that has been imposed on Nottinghamshire constabulary and how Newark and associated areas are losing officers in order to police Nottingham. I understand the reasons behind that, but without extra funding my constituency and areas like it will continue to become increasingly lawless.

The Government's failure to announce appropriate measures is likely to continue to undermine confidence in our policemen and their support services. I ask the Government to try to re-establish that confidence and to try to prevent a bigger rift from developing between people and police officers.

7.11 pm

Tony Wright (Cannock Chase): I shall, if I may, speak about antisocial behaviour in particular and in general. The particular point—fireworks—has been raised by a number of Members. The issue has made my postbag bulge like nothing else over these past several weeks, and I am glad that the Prime Minister agreed at Question Time two or three weeks ago that there should be legislation. We do not yet know whether it will be included in the antisocial behaviour Bill or what form it will take, but it needs to be introduced.

The other day, I received a letter from a constituent, who says:

"On Sunday . . . I was watching television in the conservatory at the back of my bungalow . . . there was a loud bang and a large, spent fireworks rocket came through the roof of my conservatory leaving a hole about 6-8 inches in diameter. Shards of the polycarbonate roof were scattered all around but fortunately I was not injured, only shocked. Had my wife been sitting with me, instead of in our lounge, the rocket and razor-sharp shards would have landed largely upon her and possibly caused severe injury. This was a firework from one of several parties taking place in the surrounding residential area and was, of course, impossible to trace.

I now know, subject to an insurance assessor's visit and approval, that I shall need the roof completely replaced at a cost of £1,450 plus VAT."

He goes on to suggest, not unreasonably, that it is time for something to be done, and it is. I hope that the Government will do it.

May I move from the particular to a general point on which I shall follow the interesting argument opened up by my right hon. Friend the Member for Llanelli (Denzil Davies) and taken on by the hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Johnson)? It involves the larger question of the context in which we talk about behaviour. We regularly pass such Bills here but nothing happens out there, which suggests that the factors that determine behaviour have little to do with what we do here. We should at least be aware of that when we pass more legislation. We need to pass that legislation, but we need also to be aware of the dark, shaping forces that are causing the problems in the first place.

There is a paradox here. Looking back over the past generation or so, we find that people have better lives in many ways. They have more money than ever before and average earnings have gone up fortyfold during the Queen's reign. Life expectancy has gone up eight years. People can travel all round the world, choose from 100 television stations and have personal freedom of an order never seen in history, yet, over the same period and moving from the private sphere to the public, our society has reached a more parlous state than we have known in recent memory.

If we are honest with ourselves, which we must be in discussing those things, our society has become less civilised, coarser and cruder. People are less attentive to and considerate of the needs of others. Our public spaces have become degraded. We have the image of someone sitting in their house and being able to tune into 100 television stations or to access all kinds of wonders through the internet, yet being afraid to walk down their own street. That is the society that we have created.

A few days ago, the Home Secretary said in a television interview that the real problem is one of our culture. He was right. Saying that shows a necessary humility in a Home Secretary, but the question is, what is shaping our culture and what has made it like that when we have become ever more prosperous, liberated and self-controlling, yet ever more degraded and insecure in our social behaviour?

We see examples on every side. A leading international footballer can write of his premeditation in setting about committing violence on an opponent, there is the routine disorder that is celebrated in sections of the media and the coarseness and crudity emitted from our television screens. As the forces that traditionally shaped behaviour and provided support are weakened—the home is one example; the transformation in family life over the past generation has been extraordinary and on a scale never seen before—where do people get their values? They get them from the images that are transmitted to them from other places. Some people do not have the protections that came from those old sources and I am afraid that those images are corrosive—they produce the antisocial behaviour that we are talking about.

Soon after the general election, after I had been pontificating about the civic crisis and the need to engage people more in the process, I received a letter from someone who had heard my remarks but is not a constituent. I remember his letter well, because he went through what it is like to live on his street on his estate. He described the daily awfulness of being there and the sense of degradation. After going through the list, he said at the end, "And you expect us to vote?" He meant, "You expect us to give legitimacy to a political system that cannot even guarantee the security of my street."

The bottom line for a state is whether it can guarantee the security of its citizens. If it cannot do so, its citizens will walk away from it. That is what is happening now.

7.18 pm

Mr. Andrew Turner (Isle of Wight): First, I warmly congratulate the hon. Member for Cannock (Tony Wright) on saying things that deserve and need to be said. His speech built on the contribution of the right hon. Member for Llanelli (Denzil Davies), which I admired, and at least part of that of my hon. Friend the Member for Henley (Mr. Johnson). There is indeed a great weakness at the heart not only of the Government's programme as enunciated in the Gracious Speech, but of society's approach to law and order.

I am fortunate in having in my constituency three prisons that provide an excellent service and many jobs. One is Albany, which is one of the foremost prisons in the country for dealing with sex offenders. The section of Hampshire constabulary that covers my county is 10th in the league table in terms of the ratio of registered sex offenders to population. Given that statistic and the prison, it is not surprising that many of my constituents are concerned about the number of people living in the constituency who have a record of sex offences.

Of course, the problem is that my constituents do not know—they can only assume. When the governor tells me that no prisoner released from Albany remains living on the island, I believe that absolutely, because part of a prisoner's release programme involves the giving of treatment on the mainland. There is a further problem, however, in that it is believed that many former prisoners come back, and of course, many other former prisoners from elsewhere also come to live in my constituency.

I want to discuss Sarah's law. In my view, the Government and my party have entirely the wrong approach to trusting parents with the knowledge that is necessary to assist in ensuring the safety of their children. Nobody can expect parents to bring up their children effectively without having as much knowledge as can be provided of those into whose hands their children might fall. I was greatly privileged to meet Sara and Michael Payne after the murder of their daughter. I congratulate them on the courageous and dignified way in which they have advanced the cause of Sarah's law. If we are to enable parents to do their job, it is essential that we give them information and—more importantly—that we trust them with it. Even more importantly, we must enable them to trust the authorities—be it the police, the probation service, or indeed ourselves—to do what is best for them and their children.

I use that issue as an illustration. I do not believe that the riots in Paulsgrove and the attacks on a paediatrician would have occurred, had parents been able to say to the police with reasonable cause, "I am worried about this individual—can you set my mind at rest?" The point is illustrated by the release of a former sex offender on to the Pan estate in my constituency. He was known to local parents. Parents were quoted in the *Isle of Wight County Press* as saying, "We have no need to attack him. All that we have to do is to warn our children to beware of him." That is the kind of sensible reaction that one gets from sensible parents on a council estate when they are given information. There is no hysteria or riot—that happens when they cannot trust the authorities, and when they are unsure of the circumstances in which they are forced to raise their children.

I fear that, too much of the time, too many of us share this lack of trust in ordinary people. It seems that the Government do not trust ordinary people on Sarah's law, or to serve on juries. The Liberal Democrats do not want to trust them with information on previous convictions when serving on juries. Many of us, and many of our constituents throughout the country, do not trust groups of youngsters standing around on street corners. We fear to walk past them, when perhaps the best thing to do is to say, "Hello, how are you?" Such lack of trust is becoming endemic, and we must reverse it if we are to turn society back into one that is more comfortable to live in.

The Government do not trust the people on capital punishment, and nor have many previous Governments. I deeply regret that. This Government do not even trust Parliament on capital punishment—they have signed a treaty that deprives parliamentarians of our right to represent our electors on it. In my view, the murder of the only witness to a crime is a crime itself deserving of capital punishment.

The erection of a panoply of complaints procedures has made the lives of police, prison officers and teachers impossible. A great machine of children's rights is determined to impose those obligations on parents as well, making their lives more difficult. As the hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) said, there is an increasing sense of rights, and a diminishing sense of responsibilities, in our society. I would increase the rights of those placed in lawful authority, in line with their increased sense of responsibilities. They and our community leaders are the front line against chaos. They are the people whom we must reinforce, and whose contribution we must reinforce, if we are to make society pleasant.

The pendulum has swung far too far towards what the Americans call liberalism. In the nature of things, it will swing back, and for that I am thankful, but let us not swing it back by adopting a kind of authoritarianism. To do that would be to swing it far too far in the opposite direction.

7.26 pm

Caroline Flint (Don Valley): On Monday, I was pleased to attend a "planning for real" session in Edlington, a community that I represent that is full of decent people, with decent hopes and aspirations for their families and their village. To aid the session, local school children made a large-scale model detailing the whole village, complete with cardboard houses. However, the houses in two particular streets were depicted as blackened lumps, representing the demolished or burnt-out houses that have been virtually destroyed by the actions of a few families.

I commend my hon. Friend the Member for Cannock Chase (Tony Wright) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Llanelli (Denzil Davies). They are right to point out that we need to discuss how these extreme situations can arise in such communities, and the ways

[Caroline Flint]

in which the life we live and the culture in which we operate add to the problem. However, while doing so—and while supporting employment programmes and projects such as sure start, in order to tackle the behaviour that leads to such problems—we must deal with the here and now, and the few families who cause havoc in our communities.

Most people in former mining villages such as Denaby Main, Edlington, Conisbrough and Rossington—the latter still has a pit, but less than 300 people work there, compared with the many thousands who did so years ago—mention the pit closures of the 1980s as one reason for the decline in their communities. Those closures occurred without the necessary economic and social regeneration to rebuild their communities. People started leaving the villages, property prices stagnated, private landlords bought up former right-to-buy houses, and social cohesion declined as the number of workless households rose. Moreover, drug taking increased. I do not mean the trendy drug taking by certain people in the media to enhance their sexual performance, but drug taking in order to blot out the daily experience of life, and what people see in their communities. Decline in incomes, in work and in community morale is accompanied by physical decline: closed shops, boarded-up houses, graffiti and the antisocial behaviour that many hon. Members have talked about.

In such an environment, a few families in one street can wreck a neighbourhood. Small-time nuisance escalates into fear, intimidation and arson, and before we know it a whole area is blighted. A climate of fear exists, and the authorities—be it the police, local authorities, councillors or Members of Parliament—look powerless. Imagine the impact on a neighbourhood when a family associated with drug dealing, nuisance and all that comes with it—the late-night visitors, the fights, the disturbances—are evicted from their council property, only to move into a private rented house three doors away. The young people in these families appear to live almost unattended lives, bereft of any guidance or parental control. They drift in and out of the family home, or between two relatives' homes. They keep irregular hours, stay out late, and are virtually independent of their parents.

Local residents say that they want more police on the beat. In Doncaster, we do have more police, but perhaps that is not enough—perhaps more police on the beat is not the only answer. These antisocial families demand a more comprehensive response—from the police, from local authorities, and from the courts. We need to establish new jobs in the community, such as neighbourhood wardens and community safety officers—people who will be available for community liaison and who can ensure that information given to the police or the local authority is followed up. We need to ensure that we use new technology so that intelligence is gathered together. In that way, if a police officer whom a resident speaks to is not on shift the next night, the police officer who is on shift knows what the resident is talking about. We need joined-up thinking and a co-ordinated response. Otherwise, those families run rings round local agencies, soak up enormous time and energy, and still continue a reign of terror.

If other parts of the country are initiating good practice, we should also ensure that people in the community have access to that information so that they can place demands on the people who are empowered to ensure that they get it right at least some of the time, if not all the time. That is how we could give confidence to the people whom we represent.

I have always supported antisocial behaviour orders, but they could be more effective. There are still professionals in the police, local authorities, social services and the courts who believe that ASBOs should be the last resort rather than a power that can be used before the worst is done. Those professionals also do not consider using the other powers that the Government have provided to enforce the ASBOs. Parenting orders are a good example.

We need wider use of ASBOs and that can be helped by a swifter system for obtaining orders and a consistent response to breaches by the courts. In one notorious case in my constituency, the authorities took nine months to obtain an order against a 14-year-old involved in a string of incidents. A fortnight ago, the authorities went back to court when the order was breached. The breach alone can carry a custodial sentence of up to five years. Instead, for incitement to abusive behaviour—serious abusive behaviour in this case—the court imposed a 12-hour community reparation. That teenager will spend a few days caring for dogs at the local RSPCA facility. That is ridiculous. Breaches of orders should be seen as the final steps in a sequence of offences—not as isolated minor incidents. The Crown Prosecution Service should get its act together to better represent the community when dealing with such breaches.

Truancy is another issue. Some 25 per cent. of burglaries are committed by truants. Worryingly, truancy sweeps frequently show that truants are often with a parent or supported by a parent in their truancy. We must tackle that. Dragging the parents to court takes a minimum of 13 weeks—a full school term of truancy—and the parents would most probably receive only a fine. We need to consider withholding child benefit until a parent is willing to co-operate with the school and education welfare officers. As one head teacher told me, it is not just about poverty. The very same children who play truant with their parents' consent are often taken on holidays abroad by their parents. We need to tackle truancy.

As has been said, it is when people step outside their homes and see chaos that they feel that the agencies that exist are not supporting them. That is when they ask why they should vote and that is why we need national legislation that changes lives on our doorstep, and why the situation that people face on their doorstep should inform the legislation that we pass here.

7.33 pm

Mr. Andrew Rosindell (Romford): My constituents in Romford are increasingly concerned that crime is rife in their community and they live in fear of becoming the victims of crime. The London borough of Havering is the second largest borough in the Greater London area, but we suffer the lowest number of police officers per square mile, the third lowest number of police officers per head of population, and the 11th highest number of crimes per officer.

Last week, I met the local borough commander for Havering and the chairman of the Metropolitan Police Authority, Lord Toby Harris. From my postbag and surgeries, I knew that the biggest concern of my constituents was crime, but my fears were confirmed in that meeting when the results of a recent consultation were revealed. No fewer than 80 per cent. of respondents were worried about being burgled. Some 77 per cent. were worried about being mugged and 76 per cent. were worried about experiencing antisocial behaviour. Massive concern is also felt in the borough about becoming the victim of vehicle-related crime. In addition, 46 per cent. reported that their fear of crime had worsened in the past three years, with only 36 per cent. of people feeling safe at night. Some 78 per cent. of people said that they were dissatisfied with the police provision on the beat.

I hope that the Minister will agree that those responses suggest that the problem is indeed serious. We need proper resources and enough police officers to have an active presence on the streets to deter antisocial and criminal behaviour, and sufficient officers in the police stations to answer the phone and deal with the public when they need help.

One of the biggest problems in Romford is criminal activities in the town centre, especially in the early hours of the morning. Romford has been described as the night club capital of east London, with the most night clubs and entertainment premises outside Soho. The town attracts thousands of youngsters every Friday and Saturday night, but most of them come to enjoy themselves and cause no trouble. However, there are those who take part in yobbish behaviour, causing damage and being abusive towards others. With such a volume of pubs and clubs, that creates a very intimidating atmosphere for local residents.

I welcome the Government's realisation that antisocial behaviour is a huge problem and their attempt to address it through the antisocial behaviour orders has been a start, albeit a small one. However, when the Government came to power in 1997, police numbers in Havering stood at 326. By September 2001, following a massive fall to 297 in December 2000, the 326 figure was restored. Today, we have only 320 officers, when the bare minimum it is estimated we need is 334. My borough includes three parliamentary constituencies—Romford, Hornchurch and Upminster—and 240 million people. [HON. MEMBERS: "Thousand."] I am sorry, I mean 240,000. We have lost a police station in Collier Row, in the north of my constituency and the Romford station is now the only 24-hour station serving the entire borough—all three constituencies. It is no wonder that confidence is so low and crime is increasing: the yobs know they can get away with their behaviour because there is little there to stop them.

If the Government are serious about law and order, I suggest that they tackle the problem at the root and give the police the numbers and the power they need to have a noticeable presence and the authority, once more, to fight back. We must also give the police the confidence to get on with the job, and cut them free of unnecessary paperwork and the culture of political correctness that is so damaging.

The drug problem is becoming rife. If we are to classify anyone as antisocial, those who deal in and take drugs must be prime targets. The Government's confusing approach to drugs will make our streets no-go areas for the decent majority of law-abiding citizens. If the Government want to stamp out antisocial behaviour, the message must be strong and clear. Drugs cause crime. Drugs destroy the lives of our youngsters. Drugs are simply wrong. I fear that no progress will be made until that message is sent out and real action is taken to stamp out drug use.

Police numbers and resources are not the only problem. On 14 December last year, Scott Young, a 14-year-old from my constituency, was set upon as he walked home with friends from a nearby fish and chip shop. He was punched in the face and, terrified of further assault, ran into the paths of two cars. Tragically, he died from multiple injuries after the incident, but the perpetrator of the crime was given a sentence of only three years' imprisonment.

When I heard about that, I was appalled. That repulsion and disbelief is shared by the thousands of people who have already signed a petition organised by Scott's parents to mark their disgust at the way in which the law appears to display more understanding for criminals than for victims and their families. How can our constituents have confidence that the rule of law is being upheld, and that their lives and their loved ones' lives are safe, when such judgments are made? I sincerely hope that the proposed Bill on criminal justice and sentencing takes careful note of cases such as that involving Scott Young in Romford. I hope that it strengthens punishments and creates real deterrents.

Crime in Romford and Havering has been at unacceptable levels for far too long. It is nothing short of a disgrace that the Government have failed to give police in my area the officers and resources needed to tackle the problem. The people of my constituency demand a better law enforcement service, and I completely—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. The hon. Gentleman has had his time.

7.41 pm

Peter Bradley (The Wrekin): Antisocial behaviour has become the most serious issue in my constituency, if visits to my surgery and the letters that I receive in my postbag are to be believed. It is clearly the same for hon. Members of all parties. The problem is not confined to the urban part of my constituency. Antisocial behaviour takes place in urban Donnington, in the market town of Newport, and in the village of Wrockwardine. Every part of my constituency is a source for the same complaint.

My constituents complain about abusive and aggressive behaviour, vandalism, hooliganism, graffiti, litter, noise, including a particular problem at this time of year, as other hon. Members have noted—fireworks. However, they also complain that the police do not respond adequately to their calls for help, that the council or their landlords do not care, and that the onus on them to gather evidence for prosecution is too heavy, and to give evidence as a witness in court too intimidating. As other hon. Members have noted, it is a simple truth that one individual—never mind a family or a gang—can blight the lives of all the people living in whole streets, estates or neighbourhoods.

[Peter Bradley]

It is also true that the police have been too slow to acknowledge that low-level crime can have a high-level impact. As my hon. Friend the Member for Cannock Chase (Tony Wright) said so eloquently, the erosion of quality of life can lead to an erosion in people's confidence in the police's preparedness and ability to protect law-abiding citizens. It is not a problem only for the police, local authorities and landlords, however, although I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Don Valley (Caroline Flint) that they often do not do enough to respond to public priorities. The key issue is not just about the incidence of crime, or even people's experience of it. We must also tackle people's fear of crime.

In 1996, I conducted a survey in two market towns in my constituency. I found that two people in five were too fearful to walk the streets at some time during the day, and that one person in four—25 per cent. of the people surveyed—were too frightened to remain alone in their own homes.

A great deal has been achieved over the past five years. We have heard about reductions in the incidence of crime. In my police area of West Mercia, there will be 300 additional police officers by the end of the year. A senior local officer told me that the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 was the best piece of legislation to have been passed in the 25 years that he had been in the force. We have slashed youth unemployment, and introduced ASBOs, crime reduction partnerships, neighbourhood wardens and on-the-spot fines, and it is clear that such measures can work.

In the target areas, street crime has fallen by 16 per cent. in recent months. I welcome that, but the job is only half done if people do not feel safer. As has been noted, it is important to recognise that although our constituents are worried about the state of the world and our nation, they are most concerned about what happens outside their own front doors. If people believe that their neighbourhood is down at heel and uncared for, that is how they feel too. If their neighbourhood looks good, they feel good. We need to learn that lesson quickly.

We need a cultural change, as other hon. Members have said, that recognises that, in this affluent age, quality of life is a key priority for constituents. It may be that antisocial behaviour has not increased in recent years. It is a difficult thing to measure, but it is certain that people have grown more sensitive to it.

I support the Government's programme wholeheartedly. I am not in favour of illiberal legislation that simply catches the tide of public opinion. We in this House should be jealous of this country's civil liberties, and we will need to scrutinise the legislation that is put before us. However, it is surely right to shift the balance in favour of the citizen, and in particular of the victim.

It is a fundamental principle that social order is based on a balance of rights and responsibilities. People who refuse to fulfil their responsibilities cannot be allowed an absolute freedom to abuse the rights of others. It must be right to broaden the powers of police, local authorities, landlords and the courts. We need to get the message across to offenders that their antisocial behaviour will be tolerated no longer.

We need to get the same message across to parents as well, as other hon. Members have noted. We cannot force them to love or cherish their children, but we can oblige them to accept some basic responsibilities. As has been noted, there are 40,000 to 50,000 truancies each day. Truancy sweeps show that 80 per cent. of truants are found with an adult, who is often a parent or relative.

The link between truancy and crime hotspots is also difficult to argue against. As has been noted, a quarter of young offenders are former truants. I therefore agree with what other hon. Members have said about the importance of parenting orders and the withdrawal of benefit from parents, where that can be justified. We also need to support head teachers and other teachers in our schools. Putting police officers in schools is an extremely unfortunate step, but it is inevitable and in many cases welcome. I hope that there will be time in the legislative programme for us to hear more about the need to teach the fundamentals of citizenship in classrooms.

However, young people are not the only offenders; they are often the victims of antisocial behaviour, as well as its perpetrators. I spoke earlier about perception, which nowadays, with the help of the press and the media, often overwhelms reality. Young people are often perceived to be a problem when they are not. They gather on street corners and represent an intimidating presence for many people, but that is often because they have nowhere else to go. It is a great shame that our investment in public services contains too small an element for youth services and facilities.

There is little that is more important for hon. Members and our constituents than making neighbourhoods fit to live in. That is what people in our communities expect us to do. We must focus our resources on prevention as a priority, but we must act decisively when offences occur to detect and convict the perpetrators, and to protect our citizens and the quality of life to which they are entitled.

I therefore welcome the priority that the Government are attaching to the priorities of my constituents.

7.49 pm

Julie Morgan (Cardiff, North): In the short time available to me, I wish to address my remarks to the issue of violence against women, particularly domestic violence.

I am pleased that the Government have given a priority to domestic violence, because under-reporting and under-recording are major issues when it comes to that type of violent crime. It is well known that one woman in four will experience domestic violence. The facts are starkly laid out in the White Paper "Justice for All"—on average, a woman will be assaulted 35 times before reporting it to the police; the police receive a 999 call every minute about domestic violence; and a quarter to a third of victims of homicide are killed by a partner or ex-partner. We are beginning to realise the extent of the problem.

It is therefore right that the Government have put an emphasis on tackling domestic violence. I warmly welcome their commitment to a consultation on it, as announced by the Prime Minister last week and reaffirmed today in Prime Minister's questions. However, it is important that the consultation moves

towards a specific end. We are all aware of the need for action. Indeed, the Government have already introduced many measures to tackle the issue, such as the national network of domestic violence specialists in the Crown Prosecution Service to improve the prosecution process and the domestic murder reviews.

The White Paper "Justice for All" has already consulted on issues such as anonymity for victims of domestic violence. Will the consultation announced by the Government lead to draft legislation, with pre-legislative scrutiny? There is a strong case for having a draft Bill on domestic violence, and I feel strongly that if we are to embark on another consultation process in the new year, it must lead to a tangible form of legislation.

The Home Office has already shown its commitment to tackling domestic violence by funding a number of pilot projects throughout England and Wales which are aimed at tackling domestic violence. The women's safety unit in Cardiff, which I chair, and which is in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, Central (Mr. Jones), is one such project. It brings together seconded staff from key agencies such as the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, the probation service, Women's Aid, the Black Association of Women Step Out and the police to provide a one-stop shop for women and children suffering domestic violence. The unit works closely with the Crown Prosecution Service, the courts, the housing departments and social services to provide a service to women and children in Cardiff. A recent independent evaluation of the project has shown that the unit has made a difference in the service provided to women and children suffering domestic violence in Cardiff. We have factual evidence to back that up: the number of persons who have been charged with offences of domestic violence has increased significantly from 27 to 40 a month; the number of victims refusing to make a complaint has decreased significantly from 99 to 79 a month; the number of repeat victims has decreased significantly from 58 to 39 a month; and the number of concern for children reports has more than doubled from 22 to 50 a month. So we have had increases where we wanted them and decreases where we wanted them.

The project has clearly shown that a concerted, planned effort to change the tide of domestic violence can succeed. However, it was funded by a one-off, one-year grant from the Home Office of £300,000. The women's safety unit is waiting to hear whether it will receive mainstream funding from the Home Office. The funding runs out in February and I want to take this opportunity in debating the Queen's Speech, much of which has to do with violent crime, to urge the Home Office to make a favourable decision soon on this and similar projects throughout the UK. We have the hard data to show that the project is working in Cardiff, and I am sure that there is evidence for other such projects throughout the country. There is not much point in talking about a consultation on domestic violence if we do not look at what has happened in the projects that have been funded by the Home Office. The Government have given a commitment to action against domestic violence and they should, I strongly believe, follow that through by looking at these successful projects.

I welcome the proposals on domestic violence, and I welcome the consultation. However, to make it all meaningful, the consultation should lead to draft legislation that draws together the various strands for which the Government have already been responsible, and the projects that have been funded by the Home Office should be considered for long-term funding.

I welcome the plan to increase the number of fixed penalties for minor crimes and disorder offences and believe that these should be extended as far as possible. I am also pleased that the Government are taking the needs of the victim more into consideration. I have some concerns, however, about the proposal that the previous convictions of defendants will be revealed to courts in certain circumstances and I hope that its implications will be carefully considered.

It is difficult to make an objective decision on one particular crime if the previous convictions of the accused are revealed. I have no doubt that some of the miscarriages of justice that have occurred have been due to the police picking up suspects who have a previous history. The revelation of previous convictions is in many ways bound to influence a jury and could result in a defendant being convicted on his or her past crimes rather than on the facts of the crime considered by the jury. Although the White Paper says that the judge will decide whether previous convictions are relevant, that is putting power into the hands of one person. I am concerned that we do not open the way for people to be judged on their past history rather than on the crime that is being considered.

7.56 pm

Mr. Adrian Bailey (West Bromwich, West): In common with other right hon. and hon. Members, particularly on the Labour Benches, I welcome the priority in the Queen's Speech given to crime and to tackling antisocial behaviour. In particular, I endorse the comments of some Members about the legislation on air weapons and fireworks. In common with many other Members of Parliament, at every surgery I have complaints from people pleading with me for the Government to do something about antisocial behaviour. It is the No. 1 issue in my constituency, particularly among the elderly.

The failure of laws and law-enforcing agencies to curb antisocial behaviour has two consequences. First, when people see illegal and antisocial activities going unchecked, it undermines their faith in the law and reinforces those tendencies within society to act lawlessly, so the problem snowballs. Secondly, as others have said, it undermines people's faith in democracy. If elected representatives cannot make laws that improve their constituents' everyday quality of life, the incentive to participate in democracy is removed. That is a profoundly dangerous development.

The agenda, which is difficult and profound, may go beyond legislation. My hon. Friend the Member for Cannock Chase (Tony Wright) talked about the way in which people's behaviour towards each other has changed. We are trying to implement a programme that will in the long run change the way in which people behave towards each other. I support the proposed legislation's underlying philosophy of rights and responsibilities. However, we must recognise that such

[Mr. Adrian Bailey]

ideas start in the home, with good parenting, are continued in school and must be backed up and supported by the legislative framework.

People who commonly evade the law are often those who are most aware of their rights. Perversely, they use those rights to exploit deficiencies in our legal procedures to evade justice. The proposed legislation will go some way to redress the balance. Legislation must change the balance in favour of the community.

Mr. Mark Simmonds (Boston and Skegness): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Bailey: I am sorry that I cannot give way as time is limited.

I hope that the proposed fixed penalty system will be used so that certain antisocial elements are prevented from exploiting the legal system to evade being brought before the law. Although curbing crime is pre-eminently the responsibility of the police, the courts and the law enforcement agencies in general, it is not theirs alone: many local authority services also have a vital role to play. Education has already been mentioned and the youth service, housing departments and even environment departments are also important. They must all work together.

Comments have been made about the link between truancy and crime. It is important for education authorities to be clear about the law and about their obligations in implementing it if they are to have an impact on crime and antisocial behaviour in their area.

I welcome the proposals on tackling graffiti and fly tipping. They may seem only minor infringements of the law, but when people see graffiti and fly tipping in an area, it reinforces the impression that the prevailing standards are those of the antisocial minority rather than of the law-abiding majority and acts as a deterrent to decent people to move into the area.

Tackling drugs is vital to deal with crime. In my local authority, a community against drugs programme was implemented as part of the crime and disorder partnership. It is working. Funding for four police operations has already resulted in 45 people being charged with the supply of class A drugs, and money from the drug trade, as well as heroin and cocaine have been recovered.

Sandwell borough council wants to continue the campaign, as there is considerable evidence to show that heroin use is being checked and there is much greater community resistance to the drugs trade. I hope that funding for the programme will be continued.

My authority and others in the west midlands pioneered the use of antisocial behaviour orders, but they have found that court processes work against them. Common complaints are that derisory action is taken on breaches of ASBOs, that there are long waits for court appearances, and the general culture of the courts suggests that ASBOs are not an important part of their responsibilities.

Crime must be tackled at all levels, starting with good parenting, continuing throughout education and within a legal system that reinforces rights and responsibilities. I hope that local co-ordination will be specified in legislation to ensure that local authorities, the police and other agencies work in partnership to deliver it.

8.4 pm

Mr. Mark Todd (South Derbyshire): I want to address two related issues. A family in Church Gresley, which is close to my constituency office, perpetrated a reign of terror on citizens around their home for a period of between 18 months and two years. It was a large family, with a number of children who attracted friends who acted in much the same way. Several of them were prosecuted for offences, but the preparation of the antisocial behaviour order took a long time. I was involved because I had received so many complaints that I could set out for the police the details of what had happened in some cases. However, the encouraging aspect is that the ASBOs seem to have provided some relief, supplemented by a certain amount of informal community social control on which I shall not expand at present.

I welcome the implication in the Queen's Speech that landlords who fail to ensure that their tenants abide by normal tenancy obligations might lose the right to receive housing benefit direct. In the case to which I referred, the family's home was privately rented and the landlord simply took the money and could not care less about the behaviour of the tenants, despite the complaints that were made. Other hon. Members have referred to similar cases, which cannot be excused. The state should not provide a pay cheque for people who are prepared to ignore the behaviour of tenants who are terrorising an area. I strongly welcome the proposals and will scrutinise them in detail to ensure that they will actually work in such cases.

My other dominant concern has not yet been mentioned: the increasing prevalence of illegal camping in my area. Typically, there are four or five such encampments—I think there are five at present—despite the fact that the local authority provides two sites for travellers. South Derbyshire has long provided a home for people with a travelling way of life. We welcome them. They attend local schools and are part of our citizenry. However, we also attract a large number of people who scorn that hospitality and are a tremendous nuisance in our ar

Normally, such people occupy a site and then trash it. They dump debris, including destroyed cars, dead animals and felled leylandii. One of the major economic activities of such travellers is to chop down those nuisances in people's gardens, but they leave them in lay-bys and on other people's property. Such rubbish is scattered across the site.

The local taxpayer has to pay for the cleaning of the site, at a cost of between £2,000 and £3,000 a time. My local authority usually spends between £20,000 and £30,000 a year cleaning up after those travellers have left. It would not be so bad if they did not immediately move on to another site in the area and repeat the experience.

The councils, the police and the Environment Agency claim difficulties in responding. There are clear breaches of environmental protection law, but linking physical evidence to an individual is often difficult. There has been one successful case—an extreme one—in which the

person set up a car-breaking business. Often, however, names given are unreliable and the police seem to be unable to pin down vehicle ownership. Hon. Members may not be aware that one needs a licence to haul waste and if one's vehicle is not licensed, it represents a breach of the law. However, it seems impossible to nail people for that particular offence.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has drafted proposals for new guidance within the existing law. They may or may not be adequate. Apparently, the matter rests with the Home Office, a Department which, I regret, has in the past had a reputation for gentleness towards abusive and antisocial travellers who bring law-abiding travellers into disrepute. I urge rapid consideration and firm endorsement of measures to reduce and, I hope, remove that nuisance. I note that the proposals on fly tipping in the Queen's Speech may help enforcement, because that is one of the major activities that I associate with such travellers' presence, and I would wish to move amendments if that is not the case when we see the Bill.

I turn briefly and finally to other points that have been made, particularly by my hon. Friend the Member for Cannock Chase (Tony Wright). The debate has certainly highlighted the institutionalising of social control. There has been an accelerating trend of transfer from informal social mechanisms—families, larger employers where people work for most of their lives, shared entertainment and social activities, shared military experience, deference and so on—to an obligation on the state to provide the same apparatus.

A good example is the work load of any Member of Parliament. In my grandfather's time—he was a Member of Parliament—few felt that they should turn to an MP to demand a response from the state. All hon. Members can now witness the fact that we receive such requests daily, yet let us consider this paradox: as the state increases its panoply of controls, its servants and representatives are held in less and less regard.

We fail to engage our citizens in parliamentary democracy if we do not succeed in engaging them in the apparatus of the state that they will for themselves through us, and we will need to reflect on that on another occasion. Their engagement is critical to the way in which any state apparatus may work, and many of the apparatuses that they wish and will through us will fail for that reason.

8.11 pm

Mr. Jon Owen Jones (Cardiff, Central): I wish to follow on from some of the comments made by my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, Central (Mr. Illsley) and the hon. Members for Newark (Patrick Mercer) and for Romford (Mr. Rosindell). I welcome the reform of the licensing laws proposed in the Queen's Speech. I acknowledge that they will do much to help tourism and lead to a saner licensing system. I also acknowledge that they will help to reduce the trouble—the violence and so on—that our police face owing to the 11 pm closing of so many licensed premises. Having said that, I want to draw attention to the problems that the reform of licensing will not address.

The reforms will not address the problems that occur in many metropolitan city centres, such as that in my own city, which have an extremely high density of licensed premises, usually with late licences—clubs and the like—and where the police encounter immense difficulty finding the resources to meet the problems that that density causes.

I hope that the forthcoming legislative programme—as has been mentioned, it is overwhelmingly sponsored by the Home Office—will include a proposal to deal with those problems. I suggest that a precept should be placed on the sale of alcoholic drinks in areas with a high density of licensed premises. Such a precept—for example, perhaps just 1p on a pint or an equivalent alcoholic drink—would be worth six coppers on the beat in my constituency.

The particular problem in Cardiff is that, during the last three years for which figures are available, the capacity of licensed premises has expanded from fewer than 8,000 to 13,500 in a 100-yd area in St. Mary street, which is in the heart of the city. The police estimate that they are policing 30,000 to 40,000 drinkers in the city centre on an average Friday or Saturday night. One reason why those figures have increased remarkably in Cardiff is the great success of the Millennium stadium, which is right next to that drinking area.

Some 3 million people have come to the city to attend the Millennium stadium in the past few years. That is a great success, and many of those people have had a good time and stayed on. They have decided that Cardiff is a good place to have a good drink at the weekend, and they often come from areas hundreds of miles away from Cardiff.

The problem is that violence has also increased. In the six months to 31 December 2001, 135 injuries were treated, compared with 65 in the same period in 1999, so violence is growing faster than capacity. Almost one serious injury is reported every night. In 2001, 63 per cent. of violent incidents in Cardiff on Saturday nights occurred in the city centre, compared with 38 per cent. in 2000 and 26 per cent. in 1999. Some 87 per cent. of those injured were male and 63 per cent. of the males were between the ages of 18 and 30.

Although ending the 11 pm closing time for pubs and the 2 am closing time for nightclubs will lead to less friction, the high density and the level of drinking make it inevitable that the problems will continue.

The figures that I have just given come from the work of Professor Shepherd who is a consultant surgeon at Heath hospital in Cardiff and chair of the Cardiff violence prevention group. He has done magnificent work in co-ordinating hospitals, police, councils, ambulance services and others in drawing attention to such problems and trying to address them.

The number of police available on Friday and Saturday nights in Cardiff city centre is typically one sergeant, with eight constables on duty. That is not nearly enough, so they are supplemented from each of the 10 police districts around the rest of Cardiff. Those other police districts, which typically have three to four policemen on duty in the evening, will therefore have 25 per cent. of their police resources taken away to police the city centre.

Of course this is not just a problem for Cardiff. The chief constable of Nottinghamshire has said that it is

"unacceptable that officers were being forced away from other areas, leaving city suburbs without sufficient cover."

[Mr. Jon Owen Jones]

He wants pubs and clubs in the city centre to pay a direct tax towards those policing costs.

Many of those who drink in Cardiff city centre come from outside Cardiff, but they do not bring with them the resources allocated to police them when they go there to drink. The people of Cardiff bear the costs in rates and reduced cover in other parts of the city. On the principle that the polluter should pay, I believe that a precept of a penny or two on alcoholic drinks in areas with high densities of licensed premises, with the money raised going to the emergency services, would be the most just way to fund the resources needed, rather than depriving other parts of the city of emergency cover.

On the basis of 1p a pint, if the 30,000 to 40,000 people in Cardiff city centre on an average Friday or Saturday night buy the equivalent of three drinks each—I suspect that they would often drink a lot more than that—it would bring in £1,200 a night, roughly equivalent to six extra policemen. There could be other mechanisms, but I hope that the Home Office will carefully consider that proposal to bring in resources to meet the causes of the problems and to fund those resources from the people who profit from the problems—the licence holders—and make very large profits on the alcohol sold.

8.19 pm

John Mann (Bassetlaw): I was described earlier by the right hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) as living in a fool's paradise. I remind the House that I had asked him to provide evidence for his claim that what was needed for drugs treatment in this country was residential rehabilitation, because that was what worked. He cited the Netherlands as his evidence base. The Council of Ministers meets next Thursday and Friday, and I believe that the Home Secretary will be present. It will receive a paper from the European Union drugs co-ordination committee, in which AWUD—the co-ordinating group of Ministers in the Dutch Parliament—states that the policy in the Netherlands in recent years has been to move towards outreach work. Outreach work is a separate form of treatment from residential care—the two are competing variations.

I make that point because, in my few minutes, I shall concentrate on the issue of drugs and its relationship to crime. A little knowledge can be a dangerous thing, and a little knowledge on the part of a senior politician is an even more dangerous thing. The same right hon. Gentleman said at his party conference that we should follow the example of Sweden, and that that would involve a tenfold increase in drugs treatment in this country. The Council of Ministers will also, of course, receive evidence from the Swedish drugs co-ordination Minister. Last year in Sweden, 9,887 people were undergoing drugs and alcohol treatment. The estimate of a tenfold increase in this country would suggest that approximately 989 people were currently receiving drugs treatment in this country, and that is not so. To suggest as the core part of an answer to a major problem remedies based on ignorance rather than fact is not appropriate in terms of good governance and decision making in this House. I trust that the House will treat such a lack of evidence with the contempt that it deserves.

On a good piece of news, I held a drugs inquiry recently, and my panel of six included a Church representative, the chaplain of Bassetlaw hospital, the Reverend Roy Bennett. Unfortunately—or fortunately—Roy has retired, and has moved from Bassetlaw in the last two weeks. He now resides in the constituency of West Dorset. He will therefore be available to the right hon. Gentleman to provide real expertise in terms of informing the debate and the policy-making of his party.

The issue of drugs is a major one.

Mr. Humfrey Malins (Woking): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

John Mann: No, I want to develop my point in the time remaining.

The evidence received in my inquiry showed that one in three households in the majority of my constituency were directly affected by drugs—the vast majority by drugs-related crime. When we looked at mining villages—or former mining villages—we found that the concentration was significantly higher. A majority of those households were directly affected, and often dually affected: a member of the extended family would be a drug user, while the house would have been burgled. As a user becomes drug-dependent—in virtually all cases in my constituency the drug is heroin, as appears to be the case in other former mining constituencies, rather than cocaine—they steal from their own family. As that dependency builds up, they progress to stealing from shops and breaking into houses, not for large goods but for goods that they can resell for small amounts of money. The item stolen most often from stores in my constituency is razor blades—they are cheap, easy to pocket, easy to sell on, and there is a big demand for them.

The police suggested that two thirds of all crime was committed by drug addicts. What that fails to quantify, however, is the vast majority of crimes that are not recorded, such as shoplifting. Therefore, that is a severe underestimate of the levels of crime taking place. The police in Nottinghamshire estimate a criminal income of £15,000 per drug addict per year. If we remember that that represents the resale value of stolen goods, that equates to £20 million of goods stolen from my constituency every year to feed drug addiction, which is the cause of the vast majority of crime. I do not pretend or claim to speak for any other constituency in any other area, but, in my constituency, that is the key issue in relation to crime. Of the 150 case studies of heroin addicts that I have provided—I shall provide the others if anyone wishes to see the 300 pages of detailed evidence—only one of them was not involved in crime. One young female drug addict told me that, for her, shoplifting is a way of life and a routine that is followed methodically.

In relation to the criminal justice system, the issue becomes more interesting. I shall not refer to our recommendations now, as the Home Office has received my report. I shall therefore concentrate on the biggest weakness, which is the National Treatment Agency. I have suggested that an Opposition-day debate could be allocated to the issue of the National Treatment Agency, as that would allow us to discuss such an

important issue in great detail. The National Treatment Agency is a good initiative, but it is not working. In my constituency, nobody can evidence a single drug addict criminal—they constitute the vast majority of criminals—who has been treated. I have asked that question repeatedly, going back 10 years, since the pits were shut and as heroin has taken a hold in the mining villages in particular. The evidence base should be created so that we can quantify what the National Treatment Agency has been doing and it can be held accountable for a menu of treatment to be provided. The kinds of treatment that should be available are not available in my constituency. We demand action, whether from the Department of Health or the Home Office.

8.27 pm

Mr. Chris Pond (Gravesham): It is a pleasure to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann), and I am sure that the whole House pays tribute to him for the work that he has done on drugs in his constituency.

A central purpose of the measures in the Queen's Speech is to rebalance the criminal justice system in favour of witnesses and the victim. I welcome that, as do other hon. Members. We must ask why that is necessary, however, at a time when the risk of being a victim of crime is lower than at any time in the past 20 years. In my constituency, burglaries are down by 20 per cent. in the past year alone, car theft down by 9 per cent., and overall recorded crimes down by 5 per cent. That is a tribute to Kent police and particularly to the area commander, Superintendent David Pryer, to extra investment in more officers and closed circuit television, and to the partnership between my local authority, the police and other agencies in pursuing the measures necessary to reduce crime. Although the chances of being a victim of crime are lower than they have been for many years, the consequences of being a victim are as devastating as they have always been. As the organisation, Victim's Voice—which has campaigned for many years for the rebalancing of the system—has pointed out, the consequences include the loss of one's job, financial hardship, physical and mental ill health, attempted and, tragically, sometimes successful suicide, alcoholism, divorce and the loss of one's home.

As if that were not enough, the criminal justice system can also humiliate victims and witnesses, depriving them of their dignity, especially in rape trials. In a recent Adjournment debate, I pointed out how the families struggling to come to terms with the loss of their loved ones in the Marchioness disaster found that struggle made worse by the treatment of the coroner who described them as

"a number of mentally unwell relatives and survivors who mutually support each other."

He described one mother who was still grieving as "unhinged". That is why we need to shift the balance of the criminal justice system in favour of victims.

As other hon. Members have noted, there is a second reason why the fear of crime persists despite the fall in the recorded crime figures. It is the persistence of those forms of antisocial behaviour that blight and tarnish the lives of many of our constituents. One constituent phoned me at home on a Saturday night not so long ago. He was at the end of his tether over what he had seen over the past month outside his front window. He listed what had happened. The doctor's surgery window had been broken; the dental surgery window had been broken; and the chemist's window had been broken. Someone had a real grudge against the health service. A shop had been vandalised; a car had been surrounded by thugs who pulled the occupants from it and beat them up; two phones were regularly vandalised; trees were torn up; and rubbish bins were overturned.

I received a letter recently from Victim Support in Gravesham about the circumstances of a particular family. It said:

"Mr. and Mrs. Singh had been the victim of quite serious assaults by local youths and they were now both, but in particular Mrs. Singh extremely worried for their own and their children's safety. Mrs. Singh was very jumpy and quite obviously upset. She started at every sound and appears at times near breaking point. They told me that there was repeated harassment from neighbours and their children, in addition, to the assaults they had fireworks thrown at the house and only that morning someone had been on the flat roof at the back of the house and left a pile of clothing."

For the young people involved, that incident was a "bit of a laugh". It was a way of asserting their authority over adults whom they knew very little about and with whose interests they were little concerned. However, their behaviour was a source of terror, fear and humiliation for the family. It must stop.

As I have said, in Gravesham, we have been working effectively in partnership with the police, local council and other agencies to pursue a number of antisocial behaviour orders, but there is recognition that the processes are often complex and too vulnerable to failure through technicalities. My community will certainly welcome the measures to make it easier to deal with loutish and antisocial behaviour, including the wider use of parenting orders and final warnings for young people. It will also welcome a number of other measures to curb alcohol-related crime and new powers to tackle graffiti, noise, litter and local environmental threats, including restricting the sale of spray paints. In my postbag, as in that of many other hon. Members, such quality of life issues are the most important to our communities.

The measures that we are discussing could have a significant effect on the level of social nuisance. Police in north Kent estimate that just 10 young offenders aged between 13 and 17 are responsible for 40 per cent. of crime in some areas. One young person had clocked up 76 arrests in just 18 months. Although it is true that a minority of young people are responsible for a large proportion of criminal and antisocial behaviour, we must also recognise that it is also true that a majority of young people are responsible for no criminal or antisocial behaviour at all. As my hon. Friend the Member for The Wrekin (Peter Bradley) pointed out, there is a real danger of demonising young people. We need to make sure that we re-engage those young people in the process of combating crime and antisocial behaviour.

In the time that I have left, I wish to point to two or three of the measures that are being pursued to tackle the root causes of such behaviour. First, I want to highlight disruptive behaviour in schools, which is the biggest challenge that faces us in education. However, it also offers the prospect of the biggest prize in dealing

[Mr. Chris Pond]

with crime and social disorder. If we can deal with the problem particularly in primary schools and in secondary schools that could pay a big premium as time goes by in preventing young people from moving on to a life of crime.

Secondly, I want to highlight the "Make Space" initiative promoted by the Kids Club Network. It is based on new research that shows that 70 per cent. of 11 to 16-year-olds believe that young people commit crime because there is not enough to do. The research also shows that almost half of parents do not know where their teenage children are after school. The initiative will provide a network of clubs that provide after-school initiatives for 11 to 16-year-olds. That will have a significant impact.

Finally, I want to mention the work of Gravesham Youth Forum. It engages young people and helps them to work with the local authority, other agencies and myself to tackle youth crime and disorder. Unless we involve young people in that process and ensure that they take responsibility too, we will not deal with the problems blighting our communities.

8.35 pm

Mr. Piara S. Khabra (Ealing, Southall): I congratulate the Home Secretary and his Department on many provisions in the Queen's Speech. Although it is easy to be swept away by events overseas—from our efforts to tackle international terrorism to possible military action against Iraq—it is important not to lose sight of our responsibilities at home. The word "responsibility" is especially important because the theme of rights and responsibilities provides the foundation on which this year's legislative agenda is to be built.

My constituents frequently tell me that one of their biggest concerns is the insecurity and, in many cases, outright fear that they feel as a result of crime. Although this country has been fortunate to have experienced broadly falling levels of crime—the British crime survey is testament to that—street crime and other forms of antisocial behaviour frequently dominate my postbag. For that reason, I am pleased that the Government intend to introduce measures to tackle antisocial behaviour.

An emphasis on local communities is the key. It is ultimately at a local level that people assess success. It is all well and good for politicians to trumpet national statistics, but unless people see tangible local benefits and feel safe in their neighbourhoods, all our hard work will be forgotten.

Last year's crime and disorder audit published for the London borough of Ealing, which covers my constituency, found that antisocial behaviour was one of the four most pressing concerns for residents, with more than a third of panellists saying that they were concerned about it. So I welcome proposals to extend the application of fixed penalty notices and to widen their enforcement, as well as plans to continue to improve the implementation of antisocial behaviour orders in the courts.

I recognise that the orders have had a mixed success. Research published by the National Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders shows that they take an average of three months to obtain. But the principle behind them is right. We should work to improve the system rather than simply abandoning it. As NACRO points out, such orders can work, but it is essential that they take local circumstances into account.

Taking a more robust approach to quality-of-life issues, such as graffiti, fly tipping and the use of spray paints, also makes sense. The term "zero tolerance" is often overused and misunderstood. Many people associate zero-tolerance policing with police brutality and the persecution of minorities, but that need not be the case. The problem often lies more in the execution of the policy than in the principle behind it.

The strategy is based on an article published in March 1982 called the "Broken Window Theory". It argues that if one window in a building is left broken, the others will soon be broken too. I agree that the system, which has been adopted in cities such as New York, is not perfect and that other factors, such as demographics, have played a part in falling crime. Any initiative on antisocial behaviour, and on criminal activity in general, will invariably focus on young people. The crime audit in my constituency found that in 2000–01, over 70 per cent. of suspects for incidents of robbery of personal property were males aged between 10 and 21.

Education plays an important role, especially in the early years. It is one of the best ways of reducing such crimes. As the Economic Opportunity Institute, based in Seattle, points out, quality early education is regarded by law enforcement officers in America as considerably more effective in crime prevention than trying more juveniles as adults or building more youth detention centres. We should also note successful initiatives such as the campaign conducted by the Boston police department, whose scheme includes co-operation between police officers and civilians to wash off graffiti and to run youth clubs.

Unfortunately, whatever progress is made in preventing youth and adult crime, there will still be offenders. I welcome the Home Secretary's plans to increase consistency in sentencing, as well as his custody minus and custody plus proposals. I am convinced that they will prove popular with my constituents as it surely makes sense to find useful alternatives to short-term custody which will benefit local communities.As a justice of the peace for 11 years, and having relevant experience of the system, I also support plans to reform the court system and to bring together magistrates courts and Crown courts to work within a single organisation.

I hope that you will indulge me for a moment, Madam Deputy Speaker, while I quickly cover proposals that fall within my remit as a member of the International Development Committee. I am pleased to note the continued commitment to development work and the plans to increase the aid budget still further. We have seen the terrible effects that suffering and disenchantment can create, and we have been made all too painfully aware that what happens in one nation affects us all. Improving the conditions of the world's poor benefits us all and it is also the right thing to do.

There is much to look forward to in the current legislative year. No doubt much will prove controversial as the Government try to strike the correct note,

whether on freedom for hospitals, on freedom for individuals or on how best to balance the rights of victims and the accused.

8.43 pm

Mr. Mark Hoban (Fareham): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for calling me to speak in what is an important debate for all our constituents.

I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann) who spoke, as ever, with passion and eloquence about the problems that face his constituency. As someone who spent the first nine years of his life in the east Durham coalfields, I understand the sympathy and concern that he displayed about the problems with heroin in former coal-mining communities.

My constituency is stuck between Southampton and Portsmouth. I am glad to see the Minister for Policing, Crime Reduction and Community Safety, the right hon. Member for Southampton, Itchen (Mr. Denham) in his place on the Treasury Bench. Both those cities have much greater crime problems than my constituency. Fareham is a relatively peaceful place, but I get an awful lot of letters from constituents who are concerned about antisocial behaviour. That issue affects people throughout the constituency regardless of their social class or the type of housing that they live in.

Many people saw the introduction of antisocial behaviour orders as a first step to tackling those problems. Many are disappointed that fewer orders have been issued than the Government suggested when they introduced them in the last Parliament. In Fareham, none have been issued. I have been made increasingly aware of the difficulties that the police and local council face in applying for antisocial behaviour orders. Despite the fact that they have worked hard together, there are too many impediments in the magistrates courts for the orders to be granted.

Sandra Gidley: I, too, represent a Hampshire constituency. A police superintendent recently told me that antisocial behaviour orders were expensive and time-consuming. However, she said that the police had had a lot of success with acceptable behaviour contracts. Has that been the case in the hon. Gentleman's constituency?

Mr. Hoban: The police and the council have worked hard to use many different orders to try to combat antisocial behaviour. At the end of the day, however, a much more severe sanction is needed for some of that behaviour. The hon. Lady may not be aware of a recent case in Portsmouth where an antisocial behaviour order was issued. Having read the list of convictions that the subject of the order had gained in recent years, I was surprised by the length of time that it took to issue an antisocial behaviour order—she had caused havoc across Portsmouth and in her local community.

I agree that there are other means available to tackle the problem, but ASBOs should be looked at again—we should make it much easier to apply for them so that they can be used to restore peace to local communities. There is one area in which ASBOs do not appear to have been used. A business in my constituency had great problems tackling the behaviour of a small group of people. The owner operated a retail premises, which those people would enter to terrorise his staff and customers. That happened repeatedly, but it was difficult for the owner to resolve the problem. He lost trade and staff, and ended up having to spend £5,000 of his own money to ban those people from his premises. We need to look at ways in which we can act more effectively to protect people in shops, whether they are customers or staff, so that owners do not have to resort to delving into their own pockets to protect their business from the actions of a small group of individuals.

When I went out with the local police in Fareham in the summer to get a better idea of the antisocial behaviour that they faced, they raised the issue of drink, which they felt was a more important factor in crime in the area than drugs. The hon. Member for West Bromwich, West (Mr. Bailey) said that it is not just the police who have a role to play in tackling problems in crime. The Fareham police raised with me the way in which alcohol is sometimes sold by convenience stores. One police officer cited alcohol being placed near the door. Forty-eight cans of Stella Artois, for example, may be offered at a bargain price—people come in, see the cases of beer and run out again, getting away scot free. The till is not at the front of the shop near the door, but at the back. The location of promotional offers therefore creates an environment in which alcohol can be obtained relatively easily.

That police officer also drew to my attention something that was emphasised again by Portchester community school this morning. School council members came to the House today to look around, and I talked to them about the issues that they perceived were a problem in their area. Both they and the police said that too often people serving in convenience stores and off-licences were only 18, 19 and 20, knew under-age drinkers in the area and did not feel strong enough to stand up to their demand to be sold cheap beer and cider. Shop owners, who may be victims of crime, need to think about their role in preventing crime. If they take more responsibility for their actions—

Mr. Tom Harris (Glasgow, Cathcart) *rose*—

Mr. Hoban: The hon. Gentleman is a persistent intervener in all sorts of debates, and I am sure that he has something interesting to say, but I ask him to wait a moment.

If shopkeepers take greater responsibility for the way in which they sell alcohol, many of the problems that we face in Fareham arising from the sale of alcohol to under-age people will be resolved. I give way.

Mr. Harris: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way. I entirely agree with his assertion that alcohol-related crime, especially among the young, is a huge problem. Will he therefore join me in welcoming the Government's moves to increase taxation on alcopops?

Mr. Hoban: The hon. Gentleman has a long memory. That topic was raised in the Standing Committee on the Finance Bill, on which we both served. The debate then was about whether the tax increase was a means of controlling the sale of alcohol or a revenue-raising

[Mr. Hoban]

measure. On that occasion, the debate was a score draw, rather than a home or away win for one of us. In a debate about law and order, I do not wish to be sucked any further into a debate about levels of taxation on alcohol.

I shall move on briefly to the topic of drugs, about which the hon. Member for Bassetlaw spoke. A couple of weeks ago I visited a homelessness shelter in the centre of Fareham and spoke to the manager and staff there. The centre is run by a charity, Two Saints housing association, which has homelessness projects across south-east Hampshire. Part of it was the St. Dismas Society, which was set up in the centre of Southampton a number of years ago. One of the concerns that staff at the shelter raised with me was that when an addict is ready for rehabilitation—we may have a discussion about what form of rehabilitation is the most effective—the important thing is that some rehabilitation is available, but often the waiting list for rehabilitation is far too long and the resources have not been put into rehabilitation. As a consequence, some addicts decide after a couple of weeks that they are not that fussed about rehabilitation any more. They will continue to create the same problems in their community and in their family as the hon. Gentleman described in his speech.

In conclusion on this important matter, I hope that the Government will examine the way in which drug rehabilitation projects are resourced. It is a problem not just in the inner cities or in former mining communities. Every community throughout the country is touched in some way by the problems arising from drugs and their use in society. We all need adequate funding for rehabilitation to tackle the menace that drugs have become.

8.53 pm

Andy Burnham (Leigh): The influence of the civil liberties lobby has been in evidence in some—not all—of the contributions that we have heard today. One thing unites people who propound those arguments: they tend not to live on the estates where the problems that we are discussing today are worst. They can afford to cling to such intellectually pure positions when their car is not being damaged, their children are not being intimidated and their community is not being trashed.

This Queen's Speech finally recognises in full a phenomenon that has been growing over the past 20 years, plaguing communities throughout the land. It is no exaggeration to say that youth annoyance and antisocial behaviour have become an epidemic in town centres, suburbs and estates across the country. It is by nature low level and difficult to get a grip on. For that reason, perhaps, it has taken a while to appear on the radar screens as a priority for action. I have no doubt that it is currently the highest priority for action affecting proud working-class communities such as those that I represent.

I have noticed today the lack of interest in the debate among Opposition Members. The Opposition are scrabbling around for speakers. Until they understand the importance of the issue to local communities, I suspect that the only conveyor belt that they will need to worry about is the one that leads to permanent opposition.

Many of us have spoken in the House about how antisocial behaviour makes people's lives a misery. I have stood here and pointed out examples of how the system simply does not have the answers, and it is clear that the representations and arguments that we have put have moved policy. They are the most important single driver in the policy changes that we are discussing today, which is worth remembering for people who say that this House is often bypassed or irrelevant.

I shall speak for a moment about the origins of the antisocial epidemic, as I think that we need to understand it, and its effect on policing in our communities. Some hon. Members have said that it all starts in the home and others that schools are to blame. Without doubt, respect for authority figures has diminished. In some ways, that is a good thing. We are a far less deferential society and hierarchical class structures have been eroded to some extent, but the downside is the loss of a culture of mutual respect and tolerance.

I strongly believe that the antisocial epidemic can be linked to the social history of Britain in the '80s and '90s and to the "no such thing as society" era, in which private wealth was elevated as society's prime goal above other things such as the common good. In the area that I represent—I suspect that the same is true for many hon. Members—young people growing up in the '80s and '90s in deprived communities witnessed a fast-developing consumer culture in which images and stories of wealth abounded, but at the same time all that they could see were run-down schools and estates, poor employment prospects and a lack of quality leisure opportunities. What sort of message did that send to young people about how we value them and what aspirations society has for their future? Thankfully, investment is now going into our communities, including those in Leigh, but in some of the most deprived of those communities, the legacy is a large number of disfranchised young people who have limited aspirations for their own future and engage in a range of risk-taking and antisocial behaviour that exasperates their neighbours.

Of course, it is the police who have picked up the pieces and borne the brunt of those problems, and I should like to say a word about the effects on policing. In seeking to address the situation, they face two problems: first, the sheer volume of calls reporting incidents involving antisocial behaviour; and secondly, not having the measures and tools available to them to mount an effective response to such calls. That has led to a highly unsatisfactory situation in communities in which the police patrol will turn up, but then say that there is nothing that it can do. The lack of anything more creates huge frustration among the public, and confidence in the police and the criminal justice system has been damaged because the measures and the tools have not been at their disposal in taking action against some of those young people.

Mr. Lindsay Hoyle (Chorley): My hon. Friend makes a relevant point. Does he agree that one of the best ways of dealing with the problem is to introduce more highly visible policing and more police officers on the streets around the estates where the problems are? People who call on the telephone and have to wait one or two hours

or until the next day for somebody to turn up experience a bigger frustration, which causes even greater problems.

Andy Burnham: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I do not know about his constituency, but I am beginning to find that the police are more in evidence on our streets. The introduction of community support officers has been a very welcome change.

One of the most damaging effects of the situation that I have described is that young people have come to believe that they run no risk of redress or punishment for their antisocial behaviour. That is why legislation is vital in this area: the cycle must be broken.

I shall draw attention to three issues that I hope the Home Secretary and Home Office Ministers will consider before finalising their legislation. The first is under-age drinking, to which a number of hon. Members have referred, as it is a common thread in all the problems that we are discussing. On Friday, along with the Minister for Pensions, my right hon. Friend the Member for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney), I shall attend a meeting in my constituency of Lowton and Golborne youth crime forum. At the last meeting, we heard how frustrated people were about the fact that off-licences were selling drink to young people. The hon. Member for Fareham (Mr. Hoban) referred to exactly the same problem. On Friday evenings, gangs of 40 or more young people gather at locations in my constituency and cause mayhem and problems. A common sight on a Saturday morning is the smashed bus shelter. As far as I can see, the only beneficiary is the company that makes the glass panels.

One issue that local police officers have raised with me repeatedly is their ability to confiscate bottles and cans from under-age drinkers. I believe that there is an ambiguity in existing legislation. It gives police the power to seize open bottles, but not carrier bags full of Stella Artois or White Lightning cider. We need to get at the supplies. The Home Secretary previously suggested that he would legislate and clarify the law. I hope that he will do that.

My second point deals with identity cards. At the risk of further inflaming the civil liberties lobby, I believe that the measures that the Home Office propose will be effective only when coupled with a compulsory identity card. I do not understand why people would object to giving their identity to a police officer on request. Many people carry bank cards and forms of ID. They should therefore not object to identity cards. I suspect that, beyond a vociferous intellectual minority, the public have no problem with compulsory identity cards.

Mr. James Paice (South-East Cambridgeshire): Does the hon. Gentleman support compulsory identity cards? The Government rejected that idea.

Andy Burnham: As I said, I advocate compulsory identity cards and ask the Home Office to consider them. People who misbehave can thus be identified immediately, and the necessary action can be taken against them.

My final point goes beyond the Home Office remit, but I would like Ministers to consider balancing the tough regime with opportunities for children to engage in constructive activities outside school hours. In towns such as Leigh, which are away from the big city centres, facilities for 11 to 16-year-olds constitute a missing link. There is no cinema, no bowling alley and there are no skate parks, but I am repeatedly told that young people are interested in them. We badly need more investment in modest facilities for young people, such as places to meet and listen to music.

Although I welcome and admire the proposed legislation, I urge Home Office Ministers to do more about activities for 11 to 16-year-olds. Such provision is a missing piece of the jigsaw. If we do not act, there is a danger that society will perceive all young people as apprentice hooligans when they have talents that have never been brought out. If we do not show an interest in young people, we cannot be surprised when they start to rebel.

9.1 pm

Vernon Coaker (Gedling): I am pleased to follow my hon. Friend the Member for Leigh (Andy Burnham), who made several points with which I agree.

Like other hon. Members, I want to concentrate on the criminal justice Bill and the proposed antisocial behaviour measure. As many hon. Members said, antisocial behaviour is the main problem that we face. A sense of disorder and increased fear of crime pervades all our areas. The Government are right to propose further measures to tackle those problems. However, as other hon. Members said, we must also try to understand what is happening in our society.

Why does a sense of decline pervade our society? Why is there a decline in respect for authority? Why do some families not appear to care about the problems that they cause others? Why do not our police command the respect that we would wish when called to specific incidents? What has happened to parental control? Those are important questions about genuine problems. They set the context for our debate on some of the problems on many of our estates.

As well as laws, crime and the courts, all hon. Members should consider the social issues that feed the different problems. Perhaps Ministers will consider a royal commission to examine that. Many hon. Members said that those problems confront us all, whether we represent urban or rural seats.

We must also tackle the problems that our communities face now. I therefore welcome the criminal justice measure, which tries to restore a proper balance between the rights of the accused and those of the victims and witnesses. As my hon. Friend the Member for Leigh said, the Bill has been described as an attack on civil liberties. However, people in the communities that I represent are fed up with what they perceive to be an attack on their civil liberties. They want their civil liberties to be asserted over those of the drug dealer. They want their rights to be asserted over those of people who cause persistent criminal damage. They want their civil liberties to be asserted over those of the thug and the joyrider. These are not the rantings of the hangers and floggers, although it is easy to portray these people as such. They are the voices of ordinary, law-abiding citizens who are sick and tired of what is going on in their communities, and of the apparent failure of those in authority to deal with the problems.

[Vernon Coaker]

How can we wonder at the disillusionment of these people with us? How can we wonder at the increased apathy that we see around us, or at the fact that the extreme right sees this as a fertile breeding ground? If we do not protect the rights of the majority, and if the state is not seen to stand up for these people, that sense of disillusionment with us, that sense of apathy, and the possibility for the extreme right to make gains in those communities will grow. I welcome the Home Secretary's efforts to rebalance the criminal justice system, and my constituents will welcome it as well.

I also welcome the antisocial behaviour Bill, which is to tackle what is supposedly low-level nuisance. It is not, however, low level, and we all need to adopt the zero tolerance towards graffiti, litter and noise nuisance, that has worked so effectively elsewhere. In trying to solve these problems, rather than to score political points, I must ask my right hon. Friend the Minister and other hon. Members how we can ensure that laws and regulations are used. We do not appear to be short of laws or regulations. Indeed, sometimes there seems to be an unwillingness to use existing laws. When people come to me and say, "These people are joyriding round the estate and causing criminal damage", we do not need a new law passed in Parliament to get something done about it. There seems to be inertia in the system that prevents the law from being used, and if we cannot get something done about that we will continue to experience these problems.

How can we ensure that the laws and regulations that we pass are enforced? How can we ensure, for example, that something is done about persistent offenders, who are still being bailed, despite all that we have been saying? How can we get councils to take action against antisocial tenants who have been warned time and again about antisocial activities such as noise, when the councils are often unable to—or fail to—take such action? There should be no untouchables in our community, but many of our communities feel that such people exist. Those people believe that they are above the law, and that undermines all of us.

For all the criticisms of the police, and the arguments that have been made about the numbers of police in our communities—the numbers are increasing and I hope they will continue to do so—it is incumbent on us as the Parliament of this country to congratulate them on their work in some of the difficult situations to which they are called. In Nottingham, the police face particular problems with gun crime, and I salute the bravery of many of the men and women who face the real problems that many of us would not like to face.

My philosophy on this subject is summed up by the term "tough love". If people do wrong, they must be caught and punished, but, alongside that, we have to consider how we should rehabilitate them and how, when they are in prison, we can prevent them from reoffending. I hope that my right hon. Friend the Minister will consider that. The youth service has also been underfunded for several years, and we need to do something about providing more facilities for our young people.

This is the most important debate that we have had on the Queen's Speech. If we cannot resolve some of the problems relating to crime in our communities, apathy and disillusionment with us, the Parliament of this country, will only increase.

9.9 pm

Clive Efford (Eltham): Tonight's debate has been punctuated by the odd speech from those on the Opposition Benches. No doubt they have been trawling the Tea Room trying to get enough people to speak, but when we get down to debating the legislation they will be in here complaining that there is not enough time to consider the issues.

We need to look at the background to our communities' concerns about antisocial behaviour. The Government came to power against a backdrop of rising crime—crime had doubled and police numbers were going down. Today, police numbers are reaching record levels in England and Wales and approaching record levels in London. The British crime survey published in July showed that crime had gone down 2 per cent., and we in London have seen the restoration of the housing allowance, which was taken away by the Conservatives. The training centre at Hendon is bursting at the seams with new recruits, which means more police officers.

My community of Eltham in the borough of Greenwich is one of the safest places to live in London and crime has consistently gone down over the past few years, but Eltham has recently suffered detrimental criticism at the hands of the media following a number of racist attacks during the summer. My constituents resent being vilified as racists by virtue of their postcode. That is done largely by feeble-minded journalists who are eager to create sensational headlines. The hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Johnson) spoke up on behalf of the fourth estate, but if my constituency has been given a fair hearing in the media over recent months, I would like to see it.

The media claim that they are standing up for victims of racism, but they have never considered at any stage the effect of their inaccurate reporting on the people of Eltham, especially the black members of my community. I must be the only Member of this Parliament who has black constituents come to his surgery to ask what is going on and whether they are safe to continue living in the constituency. People have lived there unharmed for more than 30 years, but when they see the media coverage they do not recognise the community being described.

No Member of the House can deny that they have racists in their community, and Eltham is no different, but I appeal for a more reasonable approach that deals with the issue of racism across all our communities without just describing it as a pocket—a localised problem—and sweeping aside the serious, endemic problem that we have in our society among a minority of people who are capable of carrying out serious racist attacks.

In dealing with issues involving racism and antisocial behaviour, I have discovered that what is needed locally is a better co-ordinated response from all the agencies involved. I have come across cases in which people have been moved to other parts of my borough to avoid harassment, only to find several months later that the

very people they were moved away from have also been moved to that community. The same problem starts up again, but that would not happen if there were an effective local method of tracking people who have been involved in antisocial behaviour and harassing their neighbours.

Such records would have to be accurate to avoid the innocent being wrongly criticised in those situations and to avoid malicious accusations being put on people's records, but where there is clear evidence that such behaviour has taken place councils should be able to act to protect their tenants from families who refuse to behave in a reasonable manner.

My right hon. Friend the Minister for Policing, Crime Reduction and Community Safety recently announced measures to streamline the process of obtaining antisocial behaviour orders and dealing with antisocial behaviour. That must be welcome, but I believe that local authorities need guidance on how to manage the process of obtaining ASBOs. To deal with antisocial behaviour, they need to start keeping records from the first intervention, whether it is a letter from the council or a visit from the local police. The process must begin immediately. That could streamline the gathering of the information necessary to go for an ASBO, should it be decided that that is the best course of action.

There should be one point of contact for all information gathered at local level. Guidance could ensure that local authorities and the police take the same approach in exchanging information about what is going on in our local communities. In my experience, beat officers have a very detailed knowledge of what is happening on their patches, but even where relationships are good, that sometimes breaks down when the police's objectives conflict with those of the local authority. A lack of co-ordination can also lead to individuals falling between two stools, whereby both the police and the local authority are aware of what is going on, but are not actually dealing with it. Better co-ordination at this stage would reduce the time and effort required to obtain antisocial behaviour orders, and would shorten the time taken to obtain an ASBO once the decision is taken that that is the only course of action.

The failure of ASBOs is that they have proven unwieldy, and it has also been difficult to gather evidence. Too often, residents are terrified to come forward and give evidence to the relevant authorities, which results in unacceptable delays, or people being forced to continue to live in misery. Two areas in my constituency have particular problems. In Eltham Green road, the local post box had to be blocked up because the Post Office could not guarantee the safety of the postal workers who emptied it. In Alnwick road, people have been forced into a curfew. They cannot come out after dark because of large groups of young people who act in an antisocial way, terrorising the neighbourhood.

The situation needs to be tackled through a co-ordinated approach and better exchange of information with the police. Local people need to be kept informed and given the confidence to emerge from their front doors and stand together against those who terrorise their neighbourhoods. Resources are needed to gather independent evidence, and we have the technology to assist us in doing so. We also need to send expert witnesses into communities to identify the individuals involved. Such witnesses could stand up in court and give evidence to ensure that effective action is taken against the perpetrators.

The measures set out by the Government in the Queen's Speech could result in effective action being taken against the perpetrators of antisocial behaviour, who terrorise—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): Order. I call Mr. Tom Levitt.

9.17 pm

Mr. Tom Levitt (High Peak): I shall be brief as I realise that others want to speak.

It used to be said that law and order and crime were not natural Labour issues, but given that we have succeeded in getting crime down in the past five years, and in the light of the proposed legislation and the tone of today's debate, those days are long gone. In fact, it is on the Labour heartland estates that crime levels are highest. Our young people are painted as the perpetrators of crime, but they are also disproportionately the victims. It is our old people who have the greatest fear of crime, even though the figures show that crime is actually falling. Although some fear of crime may not be rational, such fear is nevertheless a political reality. We must tackle that reality, as well as crime itself.

I shall not go into the problems in my constituency, which are similar to those that others have outlined. Instead, I want to be a little upbeat. My constituency was the first in the country to use an antisocial behaviour order, and it worked. We have also used parenting orders. Of the first 10 parents who were sent on parenting courses, six enjoyed the experience so much that they signed up for further courses. We have also run sure start programmes. Such initiatives are an investment in keeping crime down. New initiatives to put bobbies back on the beat in Hadfield will be extended elsewhere. We have a crime and disorder partnership, community safety officers and a rural policing initiative, through which a mobile police station serves 10 different villages for half a day every week. Those villages have never had such a service before.

The Connexions service is up and running—an investment for the future—and we have youth offending teams with cross-disciplinary connections. We also have two magnificent youth clubs: the Millennium Cellar, in Glossop, and Buxton For Youth, in Buxton. Both were conceived and created by, and are run by, young people themselves, often with the help of Crimestoppers and the involvement of the police. They are superb initiatives.

I want to say a quick word about the police in Derbyshire. I applaud what my hon. Friend the Member for Gedling (Vernon Coaker) said about police officers. I have regular contacts with police officers—police constables, inspectors, divisional commanders and the chief constable—and I thank my right hon. Friend the Minister for Policing, Crime Reduction and Community Safety for taking time earlier this year to meet police officers from my constituency to discuss the Police Bill, which we did rationally and constructively.

[Mr. Tom Levitt]

A few weeks ago, I was out on patrol with some police officers in Buxton. We were called to a group of young people about whom a complaint had been made. We found nothing wrong, but they wanted to talk and we spent time discussing with them what it would take to improve their reputation. There were four breathalysing cases that night and a road traffic accident. We took runaways back home. The incident of domestic violence that I attended with the police at 2.30 on a Saturday morning was handled magnificently, and all credit to them.

I know that the investment that we are putting into the police will pay off, but it has to go along with learning what works, and enabling the police to learn from good practice in different parts of the country by, for example, improving the way in which their IT systems work together. I am sure that the investment will happen.

I believe that I am the only person to mention this final point today. I very much welcome the draft Bill on corruption in the Queen's Speech, for reasons that I hope to develop in an Adjournment debate at a later date.

9.21 pm

Martin Linton (Battersea): I shall concentrate on three issues that will feature in the criminal justice Bill: double jeopardy, mode of trial and offending while on bail.

I congratulate the Home Secretary on undertaking the mammoth task of reforming the criminal justice system. To say that the system is in need of reform is a huge understatement. One of the first things that Lord Justice Auld discovered when he started his review was that it is not even a system. As he said, there is no overall direction and there are no overall lines of management and accountability. The recommendations in his report are a very good start.

I encourage the Home Secretary to go even further and not let himself be deflected either by the House of Lords or the lawyers. I do not say that all his opponents will be lawyers, or that all lawyers will oppose his reforms—far from it. But it is often our learned friends who command the most attention because we assume that lawyers know all about the law and must be right. It is an observable fact about this place that many of our honourable and learned friends who are the most radical on every other issue turn out to be the most conservative when it comes to changes in the legal system.

Many lawyers are against any relaxation of the double jeopardy rule, although, to my mind, there is an overwhelming case for relaxing it. DNA testing is now used to prove the innocence of people previously found guilty. It is also used to prove the guilt of people who previously could not be brought to justice. Under the double jeopardy rule, however, DNA cannot be used to prove the guilt of people previously acquitted. It baffles me how lawyers can seriously defend that position, but they do. They care about miscarriages of justice when the innocent are found guilty, but they are less concerned about miscarriages of justice when the guilty are found innocent, even though it can lead to just as much suffering. What about the case of a rape victim who knows that the man who can be proven by DNA to have been her attacker is not only free but immune from prosecution because of double jeopardy? She may be imprisoned in her own home by the fear that that knowledge induces.

Mr. Blunt: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Martin Linton: I do not have the latitude.

Why lawyers should care more about wrongful convictions than wrongful acquittals is a mystery. Perhaps they get to know about the wrongful convictions because those involved are, after all, their clients. Victims have no one in the legal system to speak up for them but only us. Perhaps it is because they do not like the courts to revisit their old mistakes. Doctors can bury their mistakes; defence lawyers have double jeopardy to bury theirs.

I am glad that the power to hold retrials will be extended to cover offences other than murder, as the Law Commission recommended. They will now include rape, manslaughter and robbery. I would go even further: the difficult hurdle in the system should be the Court of Appeal, which has to quash the acquittal, not the type of case involved.

I strongly counsel my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary against making the test "compelling new evidence" of guilt. That sounds as though one is trying to prejudice the jury. I agree with the right hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) that that would not make for a fair trial. It would be far better to go with the formulation recommended by the Home Affairs Committee two years ago, which was that the test should be that the acquittal was unsafe.

I hope that the due diligence test will also be dropped. If the police miss a fingerprint or fail to interview a witness, it is not clear to me why a court should not be allowed to consider fresh evidence in a retrial.

I want briefly to mention trial by jury. I admit to being disappointed that my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has had to give in to the relentless campaign in the other place and among some lawyers here against the Criminal Justice (Mode of Trial) (No. 2) Bill. I have never understood why, as Auld points out in his report, England has the unique distinction of being the only legal system in which, for a range of relatively trivial offences, the accused and not the court decides in which court the trial takes place. As a result, jurors—and I have been one—may spend three days deciding who pinched a 60p can of coke.

I agree that justice should always be paramount, but that does not mean that we should have no interest in the cost effectiveness of the judicial system. Safety is paramount in any discussion of the railways, but that does not mean that we cannot discuss the cost effectiveness of the railway system. To my mind, it is crazy to have a £20,000 trial to decide who stole a can of coke.

I welcome the assurance in the Queen's Speech that the Government intend to introduce legislation rendering it impossible to appeal against bail for any imprisonable offence. I welcome that because the carjacker sentenced for the murder of estate agent Timothy Robinson on the streets of Battersea last month was on bail for a similar carjacking offence at the

time that he committed the murder. Sadly, that is not unusual: 24 per cent. of bailees commit another offence while they are on bail. That murder could have been prevented if the proposed legislation had been on the statute book. If the murder helps to persuade the House to support the measure, some good may have come out of that evil.

9.28 pm

Mr. Mark Simmonds (Boston and Skegness): I shall use the beginning of the time available to me by apologising for not being present for the whole of today's debate. I was present for the opening speeches, but then had to deal with an emergency constituency issue. However, I was delighted to hear, in those initial exchanges, that the Government have backed away from their proposals regarding the sparsity factor in the police funding formula. That would have dramatically affected policing in Lincolnshire. The people of Lincolnshire will be delighted, although it remains to be seen whether other factors will take funding away from the police in that area.

I welcome much of the Queen's Speech, although I have severe concerns—shared by other Conservative Members—about the potential eradication of some fundamental tenets of the British justice system. Such changes might prejudice a person's right to a fair trial. The three issues that spring to mind have been mentioned already in the debate—double jeopardy, trial by jury and the provision of information regarding previous convictions.

It is possible that the Government's proposals could tip the balance in favour of the victim, but they may also tip it in favour of convicting innocent people as opposed to ensuring that more guilty people are convicted. I strongly question whether a jury can remain impartial when it knows in great detail the previous convictions of an accused person. I suggest that such knowledge could prevent a fair trial from taking place.

I am delighted that the hon. Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann) has returned to his seat. He made, as always, an engaging and articulate speech on the problem of drugs. However, I take issue with two of his points. First, the problem of heroin is not peculiar to coalfield or ex-coalfield areas. I represent a low-wage rural area. We have terrible problems with heroin in the towns of Boston and Skegness and also in the villages between them—there is a heroin dealer in every village.

Secondly, I take exception to the hon. Gentleman's pronouncement that outreach drug work and rehabilitation centres are in competition. To my mind, they are not mutually exclusive and should work together. More funding should be put into both facilities to enable young and old alike to come off the drug habit into which they have so sadly fallen.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. This is the first Queen's Speech in my experience, going back to 1970, that has not been wound up by the Leader of the House and the shadow Leader of the House. Can you explain why Parliament has been so sidelined on this, the most important debate of the year?

Mr. Speaker: Order. It is not a matter for the Chair, but I think that under the circumstances I should say that the Leader of the House has a relative who is very ill and he has to be in Scotland. I think that the House will understand.

Sir Patrick Cormack: Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

9.31 pm

Mr. James Paice (South-East Cambridgeshire): I am pleased to reply to what has been a good and serious debate. I have been privileged to be in the House for 15 years and have witnessed, as others will have done, a huge change in attitude when debating crime and law and order. When I first came to the House it was quite fashionable for Labour Members to claim that the criminal was the victim and needed help and counselling rather than punishment. So I welcome the conversion that we have seen this evening and the unanimity across the House on many issues, especially on antisocial behaviour and drugs. Some Labour Members seem to think that antisocial behaviour is limited to what someone referred to as the Labour heartlands but that is not the case. As my hon. Friend the Member for Boston and Skegness (Mr. Simmonds) said, the problems of drugs and antisocial behaviour exist in all sorts of areas, including small market towns. I share the town of Newmarket with my hon. Friend the Member for West Suffolk (Mr. Spring). It has very serious drugs problems which my hon. Friend has worked tirelessly to address.

David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Paice: No, I shall not give way.

It is indicative that so many Labour Members have spoken tonight of problems in their constituencies and have welcomed the measures in the Gracious Speech. However, those speeches sounded as though they were being made in the first Queen's Speech of Labour Government rather than in year six. The background, of course, is that crime is rising.

Mr. Tom Harris: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Paice: No, I have already said that I will not.

The Government will claim that the British crime survey shows that crime is falling. However, the survey is not as reliable or as complete as the Government wish us to believe. It does not include retail crime, crimes in homes of multiple occupation or, indeed, murder. Most importantly, it does not include crimes against people under the age of 16. The equivalent survey in the United States, which includes crimes committed against children over 12, shows that 4.8 per cent. of crimes were against 12 to 15-year-olds. If that figure were extrapolated to the United Kingdom, it would mean another 600,000 crimes being recorded. It is hardly surprising that many people—including Labour Members, from what they have said tonight—do not believe that crime is going down. Others will point to the Prime Minister's initiative and his promise to reduce street crime. It is perfectly true that, using selective

[Mr. Paice]

figures in selected areas, he has succeeded in reducing street crime in those areas, but in a wholly artificial and temporary way, by removing large numbers of police officers from other areas and other duties to flood the streets. That cannot last. In the modern idiom, it is not sustainable.

Let us be clear: when we left office in 1997, police numbers were rising. The new Labour Government reversed that and numbers fell catastrophically, so we welcome the recent increase in numbers, but for the Home Secretary to claim credit for getting police numbers back to 1997 levels by early 2002 really is bare-faced cheek.

My right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin), in his introduction to the debate, and the Home Secretary in his reply, referred to terrorism. We support the Home Secretary's call to the British media not to cause unnecessary alarm and also his tribute to the role played by the security services to protect us, but I repeat my right hon. Friend's hope that there will be a statement to clarify various aspects of preparedness. That obviously could not be included during this debate.

I want to refer to legislation on sex offences, especially in respect of paedophiles. The House will be aware that I represent Soham, the scene of August's awful tragedy. I live nearby and we have close family links with one of the schools involved. Obviously, I cannot comment on the crime as the case is sub judice, but the experience of those weeks gives me a special perspective on that sort of crime, as does an even more recent constituency case in which a man is awaiting trial for the rape of two 13-year-old girls and other offences. All were the result of internet grooming. I have met some of the people involved, so I wholly welcome the measures in the proposed Bill.

I cannot support Sarah's law, which was espoused by my hon. Friend the Member for Isle of Wight (Mr. Turner), because I am convinced that it would result in vigilantism. I hope that the Home Secretary will have noted the concerns expressed about anonymity and that he will also consider other issues relating to paedophilia, for example, the failure of some people to provide the key to encrypted child pornography. When the problems of the Criminal Records Bureau have been resolved, will he consider whether psychometric testing could be incorporated in the checks on those seeking employment in residential homes and boarding schools? Will he examine the feasibility of the remote tracking of paedophiles, using satellite technology?

We wholly agree that a criminal justice Bill is necessary. The legislation needs dramatic reform. If the Bill largely follows the White Paper, we shall be able to support much, indeed most, of it. However, the public, like the Home Secretary, do not believe that the criminal justice system is effective in bringing offenders to justice. As was pointed out, it is hardly surprising that 38 per cent. of under-18-year-olds commit at least one further offence while they are on bail and that 12 per cent. of those bailed fail to appear.

My right hon. Friend the Member for North-West Cambridgeshire (Sir Brian Mawhinney) referred to prisons. The Government appealed to the courts to stop sending people to prison and created the presumption that people serving less than a year can be released 60 days earlier on a curfew—now increased to 90 days. That is not a considered policy of reform; it is a panic reaction from a Government who see prison populations soaring.

When the former Home Secretary, now the Foreign Secretary, spoke on the Labour Government's Queen's Speech in 1997, he said:

> "Our prison population today is 60,000 and rising. Many—indeed most—of those prisoners began their criminal careers as young offenders. The previous Government's failure to tackle youth crime effectively has contributed both to the high levels of crime and to the record prison population which we face today."—[*Official Report*, 19 May 1997; Vol. 294, c. 389.]

If that was true then—I assume that Labour Members believe that it was—what do they say now that the prison population is 72,000 and still rising?

My hon. Friends the Members for Stratford-on-Avon (Mr. Maples) and for Henley (Mr. Johnson) referred to the Crime (International Co-operation) Bill and the Extradition Bill. I am interested in the fact that no one—not even the Home Secretary—has attempted to justify the proposal that someone could be arrested in this country by another country for something that is not a crime in the United Kingdom.

I will not rehearse all our civil liberties concerns about those issues, and I welcome the Home Secretary's emollient remarks about listening to our arguments, but a number of hon. Members have slightly scorned the civil liberties issue. Everyone whom I have ever come across is usually in favour of restricting other people's civil liberties; the problem arises when someone's own civil liberties are restricted. That is why the job of the House is to find the right balance between creating crimes and dealing with the problems of criminality and protecting the civil liberties of people in our country.

Many hon. Members have mentioned antisocial behaviour by young people. Again, as I suggested a few moments ago, it sounded as though we were about to embark on a new Government, rather than their having been here for so long. As my right hon. Friend the Member for North-West Cambridgeshire modestly pointed out, the Government were told at the outset that antisocial behaviour orders and child curfew orders, which seem to have died a death, would not work in the way in which they were first devised.

We do not know what will be in the new antisocial behaviour Bill. I fear that it smacks of a panic reaction and the "something must be done" syndrome. Very real issues have to be addressed, but the Government are addressing the symptoms, not the causes. The hon. Member for Cannock Chase (Tony Wright) made a pertinent remark: the issue is much more about values, standards and what is seen in the media than necessarily about creating more crimes.

What is really missing from this panoply of legislation is any sense of cohesion or strategy. The conveyor belt of crime exists, yet no real strategy to identify those who might get on it or to help those who are on it to get off is shown in the Queen's Speech. Some 90 per cent. of persistent teenage offenders were highly disruptive children, so we need to pay far more attention to providing residential treatment for young heroin and cocaine addicts, as my hon. Friend the Member for Romford (Mr. Rosindell) said.

We need radical reform of sentencing for young people, so that they are not only punished, but as many as possible are rehabilitated. We believe that that involves combining punishment and custody with proper training, followed by a long period of supervision, not because we are soft or sympathetic to those people as individuals, but because trying to rehabilitate them makes economic and social sense. We need help for parents who cannot cope—real provision to enable them to steer their children away from that conveyor belt.

Most of all, we need to establish true neighbourhood and community policing, not as some sort of afterthought or simply for reassurance because it is thought that the public want to see a uniform, but as an integral part of policing and information gathering. A police officer who is always on his or her patch, not constantly being pulled away, will know where the problem spots are and who is spraying graffiti, causing vandalism or joyriding. If properly equipped with the right facilities and powers, those neighbourhood police officers will use other agencies to help them to do their job to keep order in the community. Most of all, that approach to policing will do much to stop young people becoming permanent features on that conveyor belt.

It is perverse for the Home Secretary to hide behind our opposition to central direction as an excuse for not having it. As my right hon. Friend the Member for West Dorset said, local arrangements, removing barriers and creating structures, including career structures, are all responsibilities that the Home Secretary could take up.

This Government and the Prime Minister came to power promising to be tough on crime and tough on the causes of crime. Ten years ago, the Prime Minister identified the problem. Since then, we have had more repeats than we would get from a plateful of kippers. When the current Foreign Secretary took office as Home Secretary in 1997, he pledged that our towns, cities and villages would be reclaimed so that everyone would be free to go about their neighbourhood in safety and security. We would all applaud that. He put through 12 criminal justice Acts before being shunted aside by the present Home Secretary, who has consistently dismantled everything that his predecessor did. We are now in the sixth year of the Labour Government, and we will finish undoing or correcting what they did in their first five years. Police numbers are finally above the figure at which they started, but crime is up. Detection rates are down. Recidivism is up. Almost every indicator has gone the wrong way, yet they plead for more time. How much longer do we have to wait for the Foreign Secretary's words to come true?

Two years ago, the Government promised in their targets that levels of fear of crime in the key categories of violent crime, burglary and car crime reported in the British crime survey would be lower. Have they missed that target? No, the target itself has gone missing. It has been dropped, forgotten, and is no longer mentioned. One does not necessarily reduce crime by making more things criminal activities. Instead of more initiatives, we need more police officers in our communities. Instead of more promises, we need action to address the causes of crime. Instead of excuses, we need results. I commend the amendment to the House.

9.47 pm

The Minister for Policing, Crime Reduction and Community Safety (Mr. John Denham): I am very pleased to wind up the Queen's Speech debate and to be the final speaker after five days of debate. It has fallen to me to wind up for the Government because the Opposition decided that the hon. Member for South-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Paice), rather than the shadow Leader of the House, should reply to the debate. With all due respect to the hon. Gentleman—he and I respect each other—neither of us have any illusions about where we stand in the pecking order. As far as I can see, this is the first Queen's Speech for five years not to be concluded by the shadow Leader of the House. That says something about the state of the Opposition—*[Interruption.]*

Mr. Speaker: Order. Hon. Members should let the right hon. Gentleman speak. He is in order. Take my word for it.

Mr. Denham: The truth is that the Opposition have reached the last day of the Queen's Speech debate only to realise that they have run out of shadow Cabinet members capable of making a competent winding-up speech. I had thought that the reason that the Conservative party had chosen to structure today's debate in such a way was that they were determined to highlight home affairs. What a shame, therefore, that at 7.41 pm, the Opposition ran out of speakers, and they had to scour the bars, restaurants and cafes of the House to find someone. That tells us everything we wish to know about the Opposition's approach to this matter.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): Will the Minister tell us why the Labour party ran out of speakers last Thursday?

Mr. Denham: It was the Opposition who chose to break with a time-honoured tradition to devote the entire day to home affairs, and ran out of speakers at 7.40 pm.

I cannot reply to every speech made, but let me pick out a few highlights. First, the hon. Member for Southwark, North and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes) said that, in the view of the Liberal Democrats, crimes such as burglary and car theft should not be met with custodial sentences. I trust that that will be repeated on every "Focus" leaflet that is put out. If not, the rest of us should take on that responsibility, because Liberal Democrat voters would like to know what the hon. Gentleman thinks.

I have taken good note of the calls for action on fireworks, air weapons and alcohol-related antisocial behaviour. I will clearly want to consider those calls carefully when we draw up the Bill on antisocial behaviour.

I was reassured by the remarks made about extradition, and not because I believe that the criticisms were well placed, but because I believe that we will be able to reassure the House on the points made by Conservative Members. People will not be dragged off to Spain for writing articles in London that are legal here. The introduction of extradition without prima facie evidence was, of course, introduced for Europe by

[Mr. Denham]

the previous Conservative Administration in 1991. Although I cannot respond to all the points that have been raised, we will be able to deal with them in detail when we discuss that Bill.

I welcome the broad support for the proposals for sex offenders that were outlined yesterday. Some details points were raised tonight and we should reflect on them.

My hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, North (Julie Morgan) asked about domestic violence and the forthcoming consultation paper. I can confirm that the paper will consult on changes to legislation, building on the approach taken in the White Paper "Justice for All" and with a view to legislating when parliamentary time allows.

There was a good debate to which Members on both sides contributed about the importance of drugs. It underlined the essential investment that we are making to double the number of drug treatment places that are available up and down the country.

Simon Hughes: The Minister has misrepresented our position on burglary and car crime, but I can deal with that point later. Can he clarify the Government's position on custody and the use of prison? Is the Home Secretary's view that we should seek to reduce the number of people in prison in England the prevalent one? Or is the Prime Minister's view that we need to build more prisons because the numbers going to prison will continue to rise the prevalent one? What is the Government's real view?

Mr. Denham: The Government's view consistently has been that we need to have prison for serious and persistent offenders. When, as we are doing for young offenders, we can develop sentences such as intensive supervision and surveillance programmes, which give us sufficient control over young people without custodial sentences, we shall develop those sentences where appropriate. What we should say to the people of this country is that we want the right sentences for the right criminals, and should not chase after particular numbers and targets and go in whichever direction they happen to take us.

Mr. Letwin: In the light of his last remarks, will the Minister tell us why 17 per cent. of prisoners are today subject to early release?

Mr. Denham: If that is appropriate and it is the judgment of prison governors that it is right, we will support them. The policy is working; that is the answer.

As we have set out in the debate, the Government will take forward their programme of fundamental reform of the criminal justice system. That programme began with the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, which introduced crime reduction partnerships and youth offending teams and established the Youth of Justice Board. It has already achieved a 14.6 per cent. of decrease in the rate of reoffending by and reconvictions of young people. The measures that we have taken so far have helped to contribute to the fall of 20 per cent. in the overall level of crime.

This year, we took through the House the Police Reform Act 2002, which created the framework for improving the performance of every police force in England and Wales. In the coming year, we will reform sentencing, court procedures and put witnesses and victims at the heart of the criminal justice system. Step by step, the criminal justice system is being reformed from beginning to end.

The Opposition have largely carped and criticised tonight, but I am no wiser about what they would do. They are still dogged by their record. Let us remember that, 10 years ago, the Conservatives thought that the police service needed reform. What did they do? They looked for somebody to reform it. Where did they look? They looked where any Conservative Home Secretary would look: not to the police service or the police authority, but to a man who made cigarettes. We remember the history. Sheehy came. Sheehy went. The Conservatives gave up on police reform and filed it under "too difficult". But we have not filed it under "too difficult". Instead of asking a tobacco manufacturer how to do it, we worked with the police service on the reforms in last year's legislation. That is why they will work and support our police officers in the work that they need to do.

Not everyone agrees with every part of the reforms. Any reform worth having will be opposed by people who do not want change. The same will be true of our changes to the criminal justice system. Not all of them will be popular with people who do not want change, but the ideas that we will introduce will come from the experience of victims, witnesses, police officers, lawyers, judges and magistrates.

Having abandoned police reform, the Conservative party never tried to reform the criminal justice system in their 18 years in government. It allowed the system established under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984, which was right and proper when it was introduced, to become inflexible and bureaucratic. It allowed the Crown Prosecution Service—a necessary initiative—to become too distant from the police with whom it needed to work closely. The Conservatives promised in 1992 to increase police officer numbers by 5,000 and ended up cutting them by 1,000. We have increased the number by 5,500 in the past two years and that will rise by an extra 2,500 by 2004. We are making the changes that the Conservatives failed to make.

The hon. Member for South-East Cambridgeshire was elected when recorded crime in his county stood at 34,097. By 1997, it had risen under the Tories to 69,513. He will be pleased that it has fallen since Labour came to power in 1997 because that was not the case when he was a Minister. However, I hear hon. Members say that Labour cannot live off old Tory failures anymore. Apparently, the Conservative party is refreshed. It is reborn. It has a new leader, untainted by the past, and a new shadow Home Secretary, who is only marginally tainted by missing £20 billion a couple of years ago. The problem is that they are still getting it wrong.

The Conservatives said that no one would want community support officers, but 27 police forces will have them next year. They condemned the Government for not dealing with neighbourhood policing, but every time we discussed the Police Reform Act last year and said that we wanted measures to improve the quality of

policing across the country, the Conservatives said, "No. You can't do that. That's not the job of the Government."

Let us consider how the right hon. Member for West Dorset (Mr. Letwin) reacted to the street crime initiative. He said:

"another day, another initiative, another summit, another quick fix."

By the end of September, street crime was 16 per cent. below the level at which it stood at the start of the campaign. The Conservatives said that the street crime initiative would drive up other crimes. In fact, in the 20 basic command units in which street crime fell the most, burglary and car crime fell too. In London and the west midlands, not only were there dramatically fewer young victims of crime, but there were fewer young people committing crime too.

The Conservatives said the street crime initiative was a gimmick. They were wrong. They got it wrong last time they were in power, they got it wrong this time and everyone knows that they would get it wrong again. Of course, a month ago in the House of Lords, when we said that asylum seekers who commit crimes—

Question, That the Question be now put, *put and agreed to.*

Question put accordingly, That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 152, Noes 372.

Division No. 2] **[9:59 pm**

AYES

Ainsworth, Peter *(E Surrey)*
Amess, David
Ancram, rh Michael
Arbuthnot, rh James
Atkinson, Peter *(Hexham)*
Bacon, Richard
Baldry, Tony
Baron, John *(Billericay)*
Beggs, Roy *(E Antrim)*
Bellingham, Henry
Bercow, John
Beresford, Sir Paul
Blunt, Crispin
Bottomley, Peter *(Worthing W)*
Brady, Graham
Brazier, Julian
Browning, Mrs Angela
Burns, Simon
Burnside, David
Burt, Alistair
Butterfill, John
Cameron, David
Cash, William
Chapman, Sir Sydney *(Chipping Barnet)*
Chope, Christopher
Clappison, James
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey
Collins, Tim
Conway, Derek
Cormack, Sir Patrick
Cran, James *(Beverley)*
Davis, rh David *(Haltemprice & Howden)*
Djanogly, Jonathan
Dodds, Nigel
Donaldson, Jeffrey M.
Dorrell, rh Stephen
Duncan, Alan *(Rutland)*
Duncan, Peter *(Galloway)*
Duncan Smith, rh Iain
Evans, Nigel
Fabricant, Michael
Field, Mark *(Cities of London & Westminster)*
Flight, Howard
Flook, Adrian
Forth, rh Eric
Gale, Roger *(N Thanet)*
Garnier, hon. Edward
Gibb, Nick *(Bognor Regis)*
Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Goodman, Paul
Gray, James *(N Wilts)*
Grayling, Chris
Green, Damian *(Ashford)*
Grieve, Dominic
Gummer, rh John
Hague, rh William
Hammond, Philip
Hawkins, Nick
Hayes, John *(S Holland)*
Heald, Oliver
Heathcoat-Amory, rh David
Hendry, Charles
Hermon, Lady
Hoban, Mark *(Fareham)*
Hogg, rh Douglas
Horam, John *(Orpington)*
Howarth, Gerald *(Aldershot)*
Hunter, Andrew
Jack, rh Michael
Jackson, Robert *(Wantage)*
Jenkin, Bernard
Johnson, Boris *(Henley)*
Key, Robert *(Salisbury)*
Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Knight, rh Greg *(E Yorkshire)*
Laing, Mrs Eleanor
Leigh, Edward
Letwin, rh Oliver
Lewis, Dr. Julian *(New Forest E)*
Liddell-Grainger, Ian
Lilley, rh Peter
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter *(M-Worcs)*
McIntosh, Miss Anne
MacKay, rh Andrew
Maclean, rh David
McLoughlin, Patrick
Malins, Humfrey
Maples, John
Mates, Michael
Maude, rh Francis
Mawhinney, rh Sir Brian
May, Mrs Theresa
Mercer, Patrick
Mitchell, Andrew *(Sutton Coldfield)*
Moss, Malcolm
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
Norman, Archie
O'Brien, Stephen *(Eddisbury)*
Osborne, George *(Tatton)*
Page, Richard
Paice, James
Paterson, Owen
Pickles, Eric
Prisk, Mark *(Hertford)*
Randall, John
Redwood, rh John
Robathan, Andrew
Robertson, Hugh *(Faversham & M-Kent)*
Robertson, Laurence *(Tewk'b'ry)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Roe, Mrs Marion
Rosindell, Andrew
Ruffley, David
Selous, Andrew
Shepherd, Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Keith *(M-Norfolk)*
Smyth, Rev. Martin *(Belfast S)*
Soames, Nicholas
Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Spicer, Sir Michael
Spink, Bob *(Castle Point)*
Spring, Richard
Stanley, rh Sir John
Steen, Anthony
Streeter, Gary
Swayne, Desmond
Swire, Hugo *(E Devon)*
Syms, Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Taylor, Ian *(Esher)*
Taylor, John *(Solihull)*
Taylor, Sir Teddy
Tredinnick, David
Trend, Michael
Trimble, rh David
Turner, Andrew *(Isle of Wight)*
Tyrie, Andrew
Viggers, Peter
Waterson, Nigel
Watkinson, Angela
Whittingdale, John
Widdecombe, rh Miss Ann
Wiggin, Bill
Wilkinson, John
Willetts, David
Winterton, Ann *(Congleton)*
Winterton, Sir Nicholas *(Macclesfield)*
Yeo, Tim *(S Suffolk)*
Young, rh Sir George

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. David Wilshire and
Mr. Mark Francois

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allan, Richard
Allen, Graham
Anderson, rh Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Baker, Norman
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barrett, John
Barron, rh Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, rh Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Beith, rh A. J.
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe *(Bootle)*
Berry, Roger
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, rh David
Borrow, David
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brake, Tom *(Carshalton)*
Breed, Colin
Brennan, Kevin
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Brown, rh Nicholas *(Newcastle E Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bruce, Malcolm
Bryant, Chris
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnett, John
Burnham, Andy
Byers, rh Stephen
Cable, Dr. Vincent
Caborn, rh Richard
Cairns, David
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, rh Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Caton, Martin

Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chidgey, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, rh Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann *(Cynon V)*
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cotter, Brian
Cousins, Jim
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cunningham, rh Dr. Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Dalyell, Tam
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, rh John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobson, rh Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Doran, Frank
Doughty, Sue
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Ewing, Annabelle
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul *(Newport W)*
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Foulkes, rh George
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
Gardiner, Barry
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
George, rh Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gidley, Sandra
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, rh Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hanson, David
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Harris, Dr. Evan *(Oxford W & Abingdon)*
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Harvey, Nick
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Healey, John
Heath, David
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, rh Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Holmes, Paul
Hood, Jimmy *(Clydesdale)*
Hope, Phil *(Corby)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Howells, Dr. Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Hutton, rh John
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Illsley, Eric
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, rh Tessa
Kaufman, rh Gerald
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford)*
Keetch, Paul
Kemp, Fraser
Kennedy, rh Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness)*
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green & Bow)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Lamb, Norman
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lazarowicz, Mark
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, rh Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Love, Andrew
Luke, Iain *(Dundee E)*
Lyons, John *(Strathkelvin)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCartney, rh Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury & Atcham)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, rh Michael
Meale, Alan *(Mansfield)*
Merron, Gillian
Michael, rh Alun
Milburn, rh Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr. Lewis
Moore, Michael
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Morris, rh Estelle
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
Norris, Dan *(Wansdyke)*
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Öpik, Lembit
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr. Nick
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, rh John
Price, Adam *(E Carmarthen & Dinefwr)*
Prosser, Gwyn
Pugh, Dr. John
Purchase, Ken
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Raynsford, rh Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Reid, rh Dr. John *(Hamilton N & Bellshill)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Coventry NW)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruane, Chris
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Salmond, Alex
Sanders, Adrian
Sarwar, Mohammad
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Simon, Siôn *(B'ham Erdington)*
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, rh Chris *(Islington S & Finsbury)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns & Kincardine)*
Spellar, rh John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E & Lochaber)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Stunell, Andrew
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, rh Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Dr. Richard *(Wyre F)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Harrow W)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*

Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Vaz, Keith *(Leicester E)*
Walley, Ms Joan
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Tom *(W Bromwich E)*
Watts, David
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
Weir, Michael
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Wishart, Pete
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Wray, James *(Glasgow Baillieston)*
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Ivor Caplin and Joan Ryan

Question accordingly negatived.

Amendment proposed, at the end of the Question, to add:

"But humbly regret that the Gracious Speech distracts from sound policies which deal effectively with crime and its causes by proposing further untried quick fixes and measures which threaten civil liberties and the rights of defendants; believe that Government proposals for health and social care unfairly punish social services for Government failure, fail to provide proper democratically accountable decentralisation and create inequitable distinctions in funding between foundation hospitals and others; regret the lack of provision for free personal care for elderly and disabled people and the failure to tackle the pension crisis; note that the Government has failed to put the environment at the heart of its legislative agenda and address the crisis in the public transport system; note the 7 per cent. real terms reduction in funding per student by Government since 1997, and the failure to rule out top-up fees, allow the Welsh Assembly to operate its own student funding arrangements for Wales or re-open the Tomlinson Inquiry into A Level grade fixing; regret the continued failure of the Government to provide for a referendum on a fair voting system for the House of Commons; and regret the absence of the promised Bill to protect the Civil Service from politicisation and of Government measures to tackle the steep inequalities which continue to afflict the most disadvantaged members in society."—*[Simon Hughes.]*

Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 33 (Calling of amendments at end of debate), That the amendment be made:—

The House divided: Ayes 55, Noes 319.

Division No. 3] **[10:15 pm**

AYES

Allan, Richard
Baker, Norman
Barrett, John
Beith, rh A. J.
Breed, Colin
Bruce, Malcolm
Burnett, John
Cable, Dr. Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, rh Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Chidgey, David
Cotter, Brian
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Doughty, Sue
Ewing, Annabelle
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
Gidley, Sandra
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Harris, Dr. Evan *(Oxford W & Abingdon)*
Harvey, Nick
Heath, David
Holmes, Paul
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, rh Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness)*
Lamb, Norman
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury & Atcham)*
Moore, Michael
Öpik, Lembit
Price, Adam *(E Carmarthen & Dinefwr)*
Pugh, Dr. John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Salmond, Alex
Sanders, Adrian
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns & Kincardine)*
Stunell, Andrew
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Dr. Richard *(Wyre F)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
Weir, Michael
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Wishart, Pete
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mrs. Annette L. Brooke and Tom Brake

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, rh Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, rh Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Beckett, rh Margaret
Begg, Miss Anne
Beggs, Roy *(E Antrim)*
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe *(Bootle)*
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blackman, Liz
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, rh David
Borrow, David
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, rh Nicholas *(Newcastle E Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bryant, Chris
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Burnside, David
Byers, rh Stephen
Caborn, rh Richard
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, rh Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann *(Cynon V)*
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy
Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cunningham, rh Dr. Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, rh Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, rh John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobson, rh Frank
Dodds, Nigel
Donaldson, Jeffrey M.
Donohoe, Brian H.
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul *(Newport W)*
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Foulkes, rh George
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
Gardiner, Barry
George, rh Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Godsiff, Roger
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John

Hain, rh Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hanson, David
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Hepburn, Stephen
Heppell, John
Hermon, Lady
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, rh Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hood, Jimmy *(Clydesdale)*
Hope, Phil *(Corby)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Howells, Dr. Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Hutton, rh John
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Illsley, Eric
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, rh Tessa
Kaufman, rh Gerald
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford)*
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green & Bow)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lazarowicz, Mark
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, rh Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Love, Andrew
Luke, Iain *(Dundee E)*
Lyons, John *(Strathkelvin)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCartney, rh Ian
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McNulty, Tony
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, rh Michael
Meale, Alan *(Mansfield)*
Merron, Gillian
Michael, rh Alun
Milburn, rh Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr. Lewis
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Mountford, Kali
Mudie, George
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
Norris, Dan *(Wansdyke)*O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr. Nick
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prescott, rh John
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Raynsford, rh Nick
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, rh Dr. John *(Hamilton N & Bellshill)*
Robinson, Geoffrey *(Coventry NW)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*
Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruane, Chris
Sarwar, Mohammad
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Simon, Siôn *(B'ham Erdington)*
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, rh Chris *(Islington S & Finsbury)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Smyth, Rev. Martin *(Belfast S)*
Spellar, rh John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E & Lochaber)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, rh Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Harrow W)*
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Trickett, Jon
Trimble, rh David
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Vaz, Keith *(Leicester E)*
Walley, Ms Joan
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Tom *(W Bromwich E)*
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woodward, Shaun
Woolas, Phil
Wray, James *(Glasgow Baillieston)*
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Ivor Caplin and Joan Ryan

Question accordingly negatived.

Main Question put:—

The House divided: Ayes 295, Noes 60.

Division No. 4] **[10:27 pm**

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Adams, Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Ainsworth, Bob *(Cov'try NE)*
Allen, Graham
Anderson, rh Donald *(Swansea E)*
Anderson, Janet *(Rossendale & Darwen)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Austin, John
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera
Banks, Tony
Barnes, Harry
Barron, rh Kevin
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Begg, Miss Anne
Beggs, Roy *(E Antrim)*
Benn, Hilary
Benton, Joe *(Bootle)*
Berry, Roger
Betts, Clive
Blears, Ms Hazel
Blizzard, Bob
Blunkett, rh David
Borrow, David
Bradley, rh Keith *(Withington)*
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, rh Nicholas *(Newcastle E Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bryant, Chris
Burden, Richard
Burgon, Colin
Burnham, Andy
Byers, rh Stephen
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Campbell, Ronnie *(Blyth V)*
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, rh Charles *(Norwich S)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clelland, David
Clwyd, Ann *(Cynon V)*
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy

Corston, Jean
Cousins, Jim
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cunningham, rh Dr. Jack *(Copeland)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Cunningham, Tony *(Workington)*
Dalyell, Tam
Darling, rh Alistair
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Davies, rh Denzil *(Llanelli)*
Davies, Geraint *(Croydon C)*
Dawson, Hilton
Dean, Mrs Janet
Denham, rh John
Dhanda, Parmjit
Dismore, Andrew
Dobson, rh Frank
Donohoe, Brian H.
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Eagle, Maria *(L'pool Garston)*
Edwards, Huw
Efford, Clive
Ennis, Jeff *(Barnsley E)*
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul *(Newport W)*
Foster, rh Derek
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Foulkes, rh George
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Galloway, George
Gapes, Mike *(Ilford S)*
Gardiner, Barry
George, rh Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gibson, Dr. Ian
Gilroy, Linda
Goggins, Paul
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Nigel *(Edinburgh S)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hain, rh Peter
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Hanson, David
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Healey, John
Henderson, Doug *(Newcastle N)*
Henderson, Ivan *(Harwich)*
Hendrick, Mark
Heppell, John
Hermon, Lady
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, rh Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hinchliffe, David
Hodge, Margaret
Hood, Jimmy *(Clydesdale)*
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Howells, Dr. Kim
Hoyle, Lindsay
Hughes, Beverley *(Stretford & Urmston)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hutton, rh John
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Illsley, Eric
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda *(Hampstead & Highgate)*
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jamieson, David
Jenkins, Brian
Johnson, Alan *(Hull W)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Kevan *(N Durham)*
Jones, Lynne *(Selly Oak)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Jowell, rh Tessa
Kaufman, rh Gerald
Keen, Alan *(Feltham)*
Keen, Ann *(Brentford)*
Kemp, Fraser
Khabra, Piara S.
Kidney, David
Kilfoyle, Peter
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green & Bow)*
Knight, Jim *(S Dorset)*
Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Laxton, Bob *(Derby N)*
Lazarowicz, Mark
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Lewis, Terry *(Worsley)*
Liddell, rh Mrs Helen
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Love, Andrew
Luke, Iain *(Dundee E)*
Lyons, John *(Strathkelvin)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCabe, Stephen
McCartney, rh Ian
McDonnell, John
McFall, John
McGuire, Mrs Anne
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
McKenna, Rosemary
Mackinlay, Andrew
McWalter, Tony
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Mann, John *(Bassetlaw)*
Marris, Rob *(Wolverh'ton SW)*
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Marshall, Jim *(Leicester S)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Martlew, Eric
Meacher, rh Michael
Meale, Alan *(Mansfield)*
Merron, Gillian
Michael, rh Alun
Milburn, rh Alan
Miller, Andrew
Mole, Chris
Moonie, Dr. Lewis
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Mountford, Kali
Mullin, Chris
Munn, Ms Meg
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
Norris, Dan *(Wansdyke)*
O'Brien, Bill *(Normanton)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
Olner, Bill
Osborne, Sandra *(Ayr)*
Owen, Albert
Palmer, Dr. Nick
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quinn, Lawrie
Rapson, Syd *(Portsmouth N)*
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, rh Dr. John *(Hamilton N & Bellshill)*
Rooney, Terry
Ross, Ernie *(Dundee W)*
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruane, Chris
Sarwar, Mohammad
Sawford, Phil
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, JimSimon, Siôn *(B'ham, Erdington)*
Simpson, Alan *(Nottingham S)*
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, Angela *(Basildon)*
Smith, rh Chris *(Islington S & Finsbury)*
Smith, Geraldine *(Morecambe & Lunesdale)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Spellar, rh John
Squire, Rachel
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Steinberg, Gerry
Stewart, David *(Inverness E & Lochaber)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Gerry
Tami, Mark *(Alyn)*
Taylor, rh Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Harrow W)*
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Vaz, Keith *(Leicester E)*
Walley, Ms Joan
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Tom *(W Bromwich E)*
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Williams, Mrs Betty *(Conwy)*
Winnick, David
Winterton, Ms Rosie *(Doncaster C)*
Woodward, Shaun
Wray, James *(Glasgow Baillieston)*
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Ivor Caplin and Joan Ryan

NOES

Allan, Richard
Baker, Norman
Barrett, John
Beith, rh A. J.
Breed, Colin
Bruce, Malcolm
Burnett, John
Burnside, David
Cable, Dr. Vincent
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, rh Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Chidgey, David
Cotter, Brian
Davey, Edward *(Kingston)*
Dodds, Nigel
Donaldson, Jeffrey M.
Doughty, Sue
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
Gidley, Sandra
Green, Matthew *(Ludlow)*
Harris, Dr. Evan *(Oxford W & Abingdon)*
Harvey, Nick
Heath, David
Holmes, Paul
Hughes, Simon *(Southwark N)*
Keetch, Paul
Kennedy, rh Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness)*
Lamb, Norman
Laws, David *(Yeovil)*
Llwyd, Elfyn
Marsden, Paul *(Shrewsbury & Atcham)*
Moore, Michael
Öpik, Lembit
Price, Adam *(E Carmarthen & Dinefwr)*
Pugh, Dr. John
Reid, Alan *(Argyll & Bute)*
Rendel, David
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Robinson, Mrs Iris *(Strangford)*

Robinson, Peter *(Belfast E)*
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Salmond, Alex
Sanders, Adrian
Smith, Sir Robert *(W Ab'd'ns & Kincardine)*
Smyth, Rev. Martin *(Belfast S)*
Stunell, Andrew
Taylor, Matthew *(Truro)*
Taylor, Dr. Richard *(Wyre F)*
Thomas, Simon *(Ceredigion)*
Thurso, John
Trimble, rh David
Tyler, Paul *(N Cornwall)*
Webb, Steve *(Northavon)*
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Willis, Phil
Wishart, Pete
Younger-Ross, Richard

Tellers for the Noes:
Tom Brake and
Mrs. Annette L. Brooke

Question accordingly agreed to.

Resolved,

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, as follows:

Most Gracious Sovereign,

We, Your Majesty's dutiful and loyal subjects, the Commons of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland, in Parliament assembled, beg leave to offer our humble thanks to Your Majesty for the Gracious Speech which Your Majesty has addressed to both Houses of Parliament.

To be presented by Privy Councillors or Members of Her Majesty's Household.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith, pursuant to Standing Order No. 118 (6)(Standing Committees on Delegated Legislation),

POLICE

That the draft Functions of Traffic Wardens (Amendment) Order 2002, which was laid before this House on 23rd October, in the last Session of Parliament, be approved.—*[Mr. Ainger.]*

Question agreed to.

PETITION

Health Products

10.38 pm

Andrew Selous (South-West Bedfordshire): I rise to present a petition, signed by several hundred of my constituents from the town of Dunstable and the surrounding area in South-West Bedfordshire, concerning choice in health products.

The petition states:

To the House of Commons:

The Petition of Consumers for Health Choice and its supporters declares that consumers in the United Kingdom have for many years maintained good health by choosing to take safe vitamin and mineral supplements and herbal remedies, and fears that the European food supplements directive and the proposed European directive on traditional herbal medicinal products would severely restrict the number and range of such products on general retail sale in the future.

The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons require that the Secretary of State for Health do all in his power to protect the rights of UK consumers by ensuring that such European legislation does not unnecessarily and unacceptably restrict the availability of natural health products.

To lie upon the Table.

Renewable Energy

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Ainger.]*

10.40 pm

Dr. Alan Whitehead (Southampton, Test): I want to put to the House tonight a straightforward and relatively simple argument about the way we live now and the future of our energy supplies.

The way we live now is straightforward to describe. Some 90 per cent. of us live in urban areas—that is, in built-up areas of more than 10,000 people. We are one of the most urbanised countries in the western world. We got into that position as a result of the transportability of energy supplies, which allowed the urban areas to which we were moving to be powered.

That urban growth has been supported all along by more sophisticated methods of energy supply. At most stages in the advance of that sophistication, the means to transport energy from the large centres of energy production to the large centres of consumption—domestic or industrial—were developed by non-market means. The national grid, the national gas pipelines, the road system and much of the modern railway system were all integral to the ability to deliver that energy over substantial distances. All were developed by non-market means, usually through some form of direct or indirect state assistance.

As a result, energy in huge quantities flows through these delivery systems, making it possible to service our grossly over-centralised urban way of life. That is also why this energy is cheap: the development costs of delivery have been written off or discounted, and the sheer volume of supply permits economy of scale.

So the next question is, what about the future of our energy supplies? That looks decidedly worrying. In short, we cannot go on with this system. It is not sustainable, for three reasons.

First, it is estimated that by 2050 or so the world is likely to run out of mineral energy supplies. We might last a bit longer if we countenanced a nuclear-powered future, but we must remember that that, too, would be dependent on mineral supplies, and would also leave behind an environmental residue that would be impossible to sustain.

Secondly, even if we could use all the mineral energy supplies known to us, or even find some more, the act of burning them could not be sustained by the planet in terms of the CO_2 emissions that that burning would generate.

Thirdly, well before 2050, the diminishing availability of what is left of mineral energy supplies will ensure one of two things—and probably will ensure both. Either the price will rise dramatically, or there will be conflict over security of supply. The United Kingdom is poorly placed to secure its own supplies. Indeed, the recent performance and innovation unit report on energy strategy suggests that, by the middle of that run-in period—exactly when conflicts on security are likely to become intense—we will be dependent on gas for 70 per cent. of our energy. It also suggests that 90 per cent. of that gas will have to be imported, probably from parts of the world that even now are not exactly stable.

Before 2050, therefore, we will have to have in place, an energy economy that delivers to our urban areas supplies of energy comparable with those of today, but predominantly from non-mineral sources. The opportunity is there, in principle, and renewables, of course, are secure. They can be obtained from all around us, and not by means of the transport of liquid fuel over vast distances. However, it is literally a race against time for our urban areas, and at present we are not winning it.

As the saying goes, what is to be done? Much is being done, I know, by the Government. We have a climate change levy, we have a renewables obligation, and we have a target for the percentage of renewables as the source of electricity by 2010. At present the target is set at 10 per cent., but the PIU report suggests a target of 20 per cent. by 2020.

That is good progress. Many of the mechanisms are in place, but we are not there yet. We will have difficulty in obtaining the delivery of 10 per cent. of energy from renewables by 2010, let alone the more ambitious target of 20 per cent. by 2020 if the PIU report is accepted. Moreover, we have to set that against the argument that I have advanced about the availability and security of mass energy supplies, and against the recommendations of the royal commission on environmental pollution. The commission stated that, in order to have a serious chance of stabilizing our atmosphere against global warming in the long term, we must reduce our CO_2 emissions by 60 per cent. by 2050.

This suggests for both reasons that the 20 per cent. target by 2020 is probably modest and that we should perhaps be looking at 35 per cent. by 2030, 50 per cent. by 2040 and 70 per cent. or more by 2050. That looks logical so far, but two powerful objections have been raised against it.

First, it is suggested that we simply cannot generate enough energy from renewable sources to substitute the quantities that we are consuming from mineral sources. A renewables energy economy, it is claimed, would return us to the age of the handcart. That is simply not true. The sun provides 15,000 times the energy use of the planet's human population every year, even if we discount the effect of that energy tied up in plant growth or the effect of tides and wind. The question is how to get hold of this energy, how to deliver it, and at what cost.

Secondly, it is suggested that even if the energy were available, the logistics of installing the capacity to generate it would be unacceptable in terms of how our landscape would look and what we would have to put up with. For example, figures have been quoted showing that to replace a medium-sized nuclear power station it would be necessary to cover an area the size of East Sussex with the vegetation necessary to fuel the equivalent biomass power stations. Alternatively, we would have to cover the landscape with wind farms or much of our coastline with wave and tidal power plants. If the choice were between no power and power derived by these means, I guess that some people might be persuaded that covering Sussex with elephant grass or coppiced willow would not be a bad thing, but there is some substance in the complaint. We know, for example, that the siting of onshore wind farms is running into serious planning problems.

The second objection highlights an aspect of our future energy policy that has been neglected. The planning of the infrastructure of future energy supply will be as important as what it consists of or how much it costs. Indeed, if the prognoses about the future of mineral energy supplies are right, planning probably will be the main issue, precisely because renewable energy is all around us. We will be looking at a different kind of energy economy—not one that unloads large quantities of liquid stored energy in one place or pipes it ashore in one place, but an economy of thousands of energy sources jointly contributing to the provision of energy in situ or exporting from a localised source to the national grid.

What are we doing to plan the emergence of such an economy? We are, it is true, bending the market with the exemption of renewables from the climate change levy. That will, we hope, tilt the market towards them, as will the renewables obligation. Within that, we appear to be standing by the market to mature the renewable technologies that will—eventually, we hope—provide most of our energy supplies. All this is supposed to happen in less than 50 years, when we are still relying for most of our current energy supplies on the generation—even in nuclear energy—of energy that derives from steam technology, a method that is 200 years old.

We say that we will not pick winners among renewables, and, in effect, that within the overall tilt towards renewables that the levy and the obligation provides, we will rely on the market to bring particular renewables to market. It will make them work when they are market-ready and the volume of supply drives costs down, but the market will not, I fear, bring the range of renewables necessary to market if it is left to its own devices, any more than it has brought previous energy technologies to market.

Here is what Anthony Giddens, no less, has to say about markets. He says it in a book entitled, coincidentally, "The Third Way and its Critics", but that should not be held against the quote. He says:

> "Market economies generate externalities, whose social implications have to be dealt with by other means. Environmental damage, for instance, can't be dealt with purely by market mechanisms".

What we are doing by not picking winners is exactly that—we are not dealing with the externalities of the market by other means. For we are envisaging a renewables expansion that essentially picks where renewables are to be generated from—that is, from rural areas, not the urban areas in which 90 per cent. of us live.

We will, we hope, generate power from wind farms, from tidal power and from biomass—all very important technologies and potential winners, but only in combination with other forms of renewables that we can obtain from urban sources, which on present logic we are not going to do. That is strange as we already deal with, and are considering dealing more rigorously with, another market-led commodity that often pops up in the wrong parts of the country and at the wrong price: housing.

We are in danger of bypassing the huge energy resource represented by urban generation, of which there could be two kinds—or, more precisely, two and half kinds. The first two are fully renewable and the half is almost renewable.

The first two derive from the sun, which shines on every roof in every town. Most houses could supply up to half their internal energy requirements from installed

[Dr. Alan Whitehead]

photovoltaics and/or from evacuated-tube solar water heating. The half is the potential of combined heat and power, which, increasingly, can be installed locally or even, with sterling engine technology, house by house. Of course, I realise that CHP is not strictly a renewable source—although it may be, depending on the fuel that is used—but it represents, as the PIU report notes, a low-cost option for carbon abatement.

For example, small CHP plants on landlocked sites behind a close of houses have the proven ability to supply all those houses with heat and power and to export some energy to the profit of the close. The capacity is immense.

Neither solar technology nor CHP would consume Sussex. They would not keep the population awake at night, nor would they block our estuaries or clutter our coastlines; yet because wind and biomass, for example, are currently deemed cheaper to bring to market, or because the market in energy pricing is stifling the development of CHP, I suspect that we shall produce a lopsided and possibly publicly unacceptable future for renewable development.

We can and should be able to consider non-market mechanisms, which are not hugely expensive, to right the balance of renewable development between rural and urban supply. There are several such mechanisms. I shall describe two of them.

We might introduce building regulations for new housing that require each new house to generate a stated percentage of its likely energy consumption from its own construction. That would mean that builders had the option, in essence, to embed photovoltaics or to power an estate development with CHP. The Government have recently, with little fanfare, amended the building regulations to require environmentally friendly boiler design and low emissivity glass in double glazing. Between them, those changes will save almost as much CO_2 as the whole of the 10-year transport plan. In principle, it is not difficult to do.

We might also enable local authorities or community groups to become legal energy generators of CHP and allow local authorities to set up, oversee and trade in energy through local CHP plants. In Southampton, there is currently a proposal, supported by a single regeneration budget grant, for 3,000 homes in the west of the city to be heated by a CHP plant, but the city requires a commercial company to make the project work. A small legislative change and some priming assistance would make a huge difference and offer a window for the development of local and micro CHP.

I know that the Government are committed to winning the battle of climate change in the UK. I know, too, that they are committed to producing an energy economy that is a key instrument in winning that battle. That is why they have my full support for that, among other aims. However, I do not want to have to tell my grandchildren in 30 years that we could have done something about climate change but we did not because the means of doing so were contrary to market conditions. I should acknowledge that I stole that line from the distinguished writer on energy matters, Dr. Hermann Scheer.

Dr. Scheer is right, however. If we rely on the market, we shall not gain from the cities and towns in which we live the immense benefit of providing our heat and power from the resources around us. That could be a disaster for all of us, whether we are urban or rural dwellers. With some relatively straightforward instruments, we can put it right.

10.54 pm

The Minister for Employment Relations, Industry and the Regions (Alan Johnson): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Test (Dr. Whitehead) on securing the debate. He has a long-standing interest in renewable energy, especially solar power—an issue on which, as we have just heard, he speaks with great expertise, and perhaps with rather more expertise than me. My hon. Friend the Minister for Energy and Construction cannot be here tonight, but I will do my best to respond for the Government.

We are at a critical stage in the development of renewable energy. As my hon. Friend says, the Government have set ambitious targets for renewables. Our current target nationally is that, by 2010, 10 per cent. of the United Kingdom's electricity needs will be supplied from sources that are eligible for the renewables obligation.

We introduced the obligation on 1 April this year and it sets out a secure basis for the development of renewables by providing a market for renewable energy for the next quarter of a century. The value of support provided to the UK renewable energy industry through the obligation is estimated to reach £1 billion a year by 2010—a massive commitment by any standards.

Although the obligation is helping industry to take forward renewable technologies that are close to being commercially competitive—for example, onshore wind generation—we are also putting in place programmes of support for emerging technologies. The Government have committed nearly £250 million in capital grants over the next three years, together with £19 million a year for renewables research and development, mainly focused on offshore wind generation, energy crops and solar photovoltaics.

I am well aware that the 10 per cent. target is challenging and that we are starting from a low base—at present, less than 3 per cent. of our electricity is generated from renewables—but the Government are determined to achieve the target. The 10 per cent. target would represent an annual saving of 25 million tonnes of carbon emissions—a very worthwhile contribution to the UK climate change programme and to meeting our Kyoto target—but the 2010 target is not the end of the story by any means.

As my hon. Friend said, in June last year, the Prime Minister asked the Cabinet Office performance and innovation unit to carry out a major review of strategic energy policy issues for Great Britain up to 2050. The PIU energy report was published in February and contained recommendations about bringing environmental policy to the heart of energy policy, including setting a 20 per cent. renewables target for 2020, but the energy review also stressed the importance of maintaining security and keeping options open.

The Government welcomed the report as a valuable input to necessary wider debate on energy and have been undertaking a consultation with energy stakeholders

and the public during the summer. That will lead to an energy White Paper, which will be published at the start of the new year. I cannot be expected this evening to speculate about the White Paper's contents, except to say that it will address the role of renewables into the future.

As my hon. Friend says, solar photovoltaic technology is perhaps the most suitable renewable for use in urban areas because it is clean, silent, can be mounted on buildings and requires no extra land area. It also generates electricity at point of use, thus avoiding losses through the transmission and distribution network. It is also largely maintenance free and can be integrated into roofs, cladding and atriums, making buildings more architecturally attractive.

The Department of Trade and Industry has supported the development of photovoltaics—PV—through a number of initiatives: the research and development programme, the domestic and large-scale field trials, the major PV demonstration programme and some parallel initiatives. For a number of years, the DTI has had a modest PV research and development programme, which has concentrated on addressing some of the technical and non-technical barriers to the deployment of PV, such as the lack of objective information. More recently, the programme has begun to support the development of components and systems by UK industry, and improvements in the costs and performance of PV cells and modules.

The research and development programme also involves putting about £10 million over three to four years into a series of domestic and large-scale field trials. The domestic field trial is supporting 30 projects in social and private housing schemes, new build and refurbishment, totalling about 500 homes and 750 kW peak capacity. The large-scale field trial for public buildings is supporting about 15 projects in buildings, such as council offices, sports stadiums, visitor and leisure centres, schools and universities.

In March, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry launched the £20 million first phase of the major PV demonstration programme, which aims to install PV systems on 3,000 dwellings and 140 non-residential buildings within three years, with an average grant of 50 per cent. After the first six months, £2 million of grants had been allocated and the first dozen installations completed. If the first phase is successful in bringing down costs and building a UK industry, it is expected that it will expand into a full 10-year, £150 million programme, with a target of 70,000 to 100,000 roofs.

My hon. Friend also raised the potential of combined heat and power. The Government share his view of its significance. CHP has an important role to play in meeting our climate change goals, cutting fuel poverty and increasing the diversity and competitiveness of our energy supply, bringing considerable economic and environmental benefits. As with electricity generated from renewable sources, the Government have ambitious targets for combined heat and power. We remain committed to our target of at least 10,000 MW of good-quality CHP by 2010. Again, that is a challenging target—the current capacity is around 4,700 MW on around 1,550 sites, representing about 6 per cent. of electricity generated in the UK. With continued monitoring, support measures and by taking into account the views of the CHP industry, however, that target can be achieved.

Both solar PV and combined heat and power are being encouraged by the Government and are playing a part in meeting our targets. However, achievement of our targets for renewables will require a step change in the development of renewables. That requires us to realise the potential of all our sources of renewable energy—we cannot rely on any one source. The renewables obligation is a market-led measure and will remain so. We have no plans to attempt to determine the contribution of particular forms of technology. As hon. Members will be aware, different renewable technologies are at different stages of development. Currently, the largest single contribution of electricity from renewable sources comes from hydroelectricity.

Moving a little ahead, in the period up to 2010 the major expansion is likely to come from wind power. Onshore wind is a proven technology and is close to being commercially competitive. I acknowledge concerns about individual projects but each project is subject to planning consents, and environmental and other considerations are taken into account on a case-by-case basis. On Monday, my hon. Friend the Minister for Energy and Construction opened Bowbeat wind farm near Peebles, the largest in Scotland and one where local interests have been very supportive. The Minister will shortly be launching a consultation paper setting out options for putting in place a robust framework to make sure that we make the most of the UK's rich potential in terms of offshore wind. Last month, he announced the first two grants for two offshore wind farms. A grant of £10 million went to each of the two projects: National Wind Power's North Hoyle Project off the coast of north Wales, and PowerGen's Scroby Sands wind farm off the Lincolnshire coast. Together, those projects have the capacity to provide 100,000 homes with clean electricity, and another eight applications are in the pipeline.

We cannot therefore afford to ignore the contribution of other renewable technologies if we are to achieve the increase in renewables-based electricity that we want. Looking further into the future, wave and tidal power have the potential to make a significant contribution, although the various forms of technology have yet to be proven commercially.

The renewables sector is doubly important for the UK, not only because of the urgent need for offshore renewable energy to meet targets, but as a tremendous opportunity for UK industry. Increased activity brings opportunities for jobs and investment.

The UK developed an immensely profitable supply chain industry for oil and gas, and we now have the same opportunity to develop a world-class UK renewables industry and supply chain that will create large numbers of jobs in this country. Renewables UK, the new organisation that I set up earlier this year, is working hard to catalyse change. It aims to create renewables jobs and bring renewables investment to the UK. The unit's overall aim is to maximise UK jobs and investment in renewables both domestically and worldwide by promoting enterprise, innovation and

[Alan Johnson]

competitiveness in the UK supply chain. That applies as much to solar photovoltaics as it does to other forms of technology.

Several of my ministerial colleagues have met the larger companies from the United States, Japan and Europe, and I am happy to say that there are signs that one or two of them may be interested in setting up small operations in the UK. However, that is likely to happen in the longer term, as most of the bigger players would wish to see a market of 30 MW a year before committing themselves to assembly plants here.

The total installed capacity in the UK by 2005 is unlikely to be more than 20 MW. However, we are working with companies under the research and development programme to develop building-integrated solar products such as Intersolar, Marley and Pluswall. We are also attempting to encourage electronics companies to get involved in the manufacture of charge controllers. The installed capacity of solar photovoltaics in the UK at the end of 2001 was 2.7 MW, so the main contribution of solar photovoltaics to renewable electricity is likely to come well beyond 2010.

My hon. Friend also mentioned the problems associated with planning consents for renewables, especially wind farms. I share his concerns. Department of Trade and Industry officials are currently in consultation with those of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister on revisions to the planning policy guidance note that sets out policy on development plans for renewable energy projects. Our aim is to update and improve the planning guidance for local planning authorities, so that it aids their decision-making on applications for renewable energy projects. My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister will go out to a full three-month public consultation with planning policy statement 22 on renewable energy around the turn of the year.

I should like to close my remarks by emphasising the importance of renewable energy and by again thanking my hon. Friend for using this debate to enable this important issue to be aired. Renewable energy contributes to all four strands of our energy policy. First, it contributes to security of supply, which, in today's society, is fundamental. Our industries and, indeed, our homes are dependent on reliable energy supplies. Secondly, it provides competitively priced affordable energy for business and individuals. Thirdly, it gives protection for the most vulnerable by first reducing and then ending fuel poverty. Finally, it reduces the impact of fossil fuels on the environment where renewables play perhaps their most essential role.

I hope that I have demonstrated that the Government are committed to renewable energy. This is an exciting time for renewables and it presents us all—government at both national and local level, and industry—with opportunities and with challenges. What is going on with solar photovoltaics and with combined heat and power are good illustrations of the challenges ahead and of what can be achieved. However, they are not the only examples, or of course the only renewables. Our task in meeting the demanding targets that we have set requires the vision to carry forward our objectives and to turn potential into reality. There are many barriers in our path, but the rewards are immense: reliable sources of clean energy, a reduction in carbon emissions, and a developing renewables industry. We all need to work together to lead the way into a renewables-based future.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at nine minutes past Eleven o'clock.

House of Commons

Thursday 21 November 2002

The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

The Secretary of State was asked—

Lead Industry

1. **Mr. Eric Illsley** (Barnsley, Central): If she will make a statement on the application of the integrated pollution prevention and control regulations to the lead industry. [81201]

The Minister for the Environment (Mr. Michael Meacher): The regulations apply the requirements of the 1996 directive on integrated pollution prevention and control to many installations at which the production, melting or recovery of lead is carried out. These requirements cover potential pollution risks to air, water and land. Criteria for the application of the requirements are based on the precise nature of the activity.

Mr. Illsley: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend. The Government have decided that the lead industry will have to comply with the IPPC regulations before 2007, the date set by the EU. That is placing a burden on the industry; companies that have registered under the regulations have encountered considerable delays on behalf of the Environment Agency in obtaining registration. The twin elements of delays and costs are placing burdens on the usually small companies involved in lead processing. Will my right hon. Friend provide some further assistance to those companies in reducing the burdens?

Mr. Meacher: We certainly want to do that, if we can. Phasing in the different sectors in an orderly and sensible way is the only practicable way to meet the target of permitting more than 6,000 installations in England and Wales by October 2007. If we left the permitting to the last possible moment, it would place an enormous burden on regulators and require them to take on large numbers of extra staff for a short time. I am concerned about what my hon. Friend says about registration. There should be no additional delays, but the window for the phasing-in of particular sectors is largely determined by the expected availability of the best available techniques reference documents, which are produced by the European Commission with input from member states. I shall look at the matter again and see whether we can give any assistance to the industry.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): The Minister is fond of recycling, but is he aware that one of our largest car battery recycling plants is Endhoven's in Darley Dale, which recycles some 80 per cent. of car batteries in this country? Will he ensure that the regulations do not interfere with that process, so that we can maintain our good recycling record in this sector?

Mr. Meacher: I am keen to encourage the good recycling plants that exist in many parts of the country, and to generate the many more that we will need if we are to meet the doubling and trebling of recycling targets that I have set down. The directive applies to about 6,000 installations, as I said. They have to meet the IPPC requirements, but most already operate in accordance with best available techniques not entailing excessive cost. As they should be meeting those standards, there should be no problem for most existing plants.

Mr. Bob Blizzard (Waveney): Does my right hon. Friend agree that the general public will feel that pollution from the lead industry is relatively insignificant compared with the pollution from oil tankers that spill their loads? They blacken the environment and the name of the oil industry, which my right hon. Friend knows I support. How can we get better international regulation of those oil tankers?

Mr. Speaker: Order. I call Chris Grayling.

Animal Welfare

2. **Chris Grayling** (Epsom and Ewell): If she will make a statement on the long distance transportation of animals. [81203]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mr. Elliot Morley): The Government would prefer a trade in meat to the long-distance transporting of animals for slaughter, and we are encouraging the livestock sector in that direction.

Chris Grayling: I thank the Minister for that reply. He will know of the great concern about this matter felt by people across the country. Although he is keen to stress that any future action must not disadvantage our farmers, does he accept that people feel that the Government have failed to negotiate effective solutions with our European partners, and that they should get a move on and do so?

Mr. Morley: I assure the hon. Gentleman that the Government consider that, in the normal patterns of the livestock industry, the movement of live animals should be minimised. Of course we must look at our industry's needs when it comes to movements and take into account special cases such as offshore islands, but, generally speaking, we believe that animals should go to the nearest available slaughterhouse. The trade in this

country should be a carcase trade. The added value accruing to those animals should go to this country and it should not be exported abroad.

David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire): I welcome what my right hon. Friend says, but the live export trade imposes chronic, extreme and high-volume cruelty on hundreds of thousands of sentient beings every year. Should not we go one step further? Should we not ban that trade and replace it with the export of meat and carcases only? Can we not work more effectively within the EU to require animals to be slaughtered as close as possible to the farm of rearing?

Mr. Morley: I agree that a carcase trade is the preference that we should support. However, I emphasise that the live animal trade is legal within the rules of the single market and it has been tested in the courts. Our record on enforcement and management is very good; we want to see the standards of the best being applied to all European countries.

Mr. James Gray (North Wiltshire): Everyone will agree with the Minister about the desirability of the shortest possible journeys from breeding and upbringing to slaughter, but does he agree that one of the greatest tragedies of the countryside in recent years, which he needs to explain, is that since the Labour Government came to power some 336 local slaughterhouses—40 per cent. of the total—have been forced to close? Does he agree with me and his own rural White Paper that that is a result of gross over-regulation by the Government?

Mr. Morley: No, I do not agree. If the hon. Gentleman wants to make a political point, let me tell him that it would be impossible to close as many small slaughterhouses as were closed under the previous Conservative Government because not enough are left in the country. Regulation is not the only reason for closure under this Government—the market, unit costs and the fact that some of the slaughterhouses have got bigger are also issues. Of course we want to support a proper distribution of slaughterhouses, which is why our rural White Paper provided financial support for some of the smaller slaughterhouses in a way that the Conservative Government did not.

Illegal Meat Imports

3. **Mr. Nigel Waterson** (Eastbourne): If she will make a statement on her Department's progress in preventing illegal meat from entering the United Kingdom. [81204]

9. **Mr. Mark Francois** (Rayleigh): If she will make a statement on her Department's progress in preventing illegal meat from entering the United Kingdom. [81211]

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Margaret Beckett): We are making excellent progress with implementing our action plan and a number of initiatives are getting results. As I announced in response to the FMD inquiries, following a review of enforcement structures we are to make Customs and Excise responsible for anti-smuggling checks. This, we expect, will lead to increased deterrence and seizures of illegal meat.

Mr. Waterson: Is the Secretary of State aware that the Meridian Television programme "Focus", to be broadcast next month, will show hard evidence of a systematic trade in smuggling bush meat into this country and selling it? As if this trade were not vile enough in itself, is she aware of further allegations that there is evidence of human flesh being on sale in this country, possibly as part of black magic rituals?

Margaret Beckett: I was not aware of the television programme nor, indeed, of the horrendous suggestion made by the hon. Gentleman. However, I am aware that there has been growing evidence and concern about the trade in bush meat, which is said to be highly profitable. The Government and the enforcement authorities are giving attention to that.

Mr. Francois: Are the proposed amnesty bins for illegal meat now available at all the points of entry? If not, why not?

Margaret Beckett: No, they are not, because of considerable doubts and worries about how they would operate. We continue to explore that with the relevant authorities, but when responsibility is transferred, as I anticipate it will be in the near future, it will be for Customs and Excise to make judgments between the different forms of detection and enforcement.

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): My right hon. Friend will be aware of the Select Committee's inquiry into the issue, and the Government have begun to take on board a number of its recommendations. Does she agree that, coming as it does on the back of the drugs trade and people trafficking, this trade is quickly becoming a huge international industry? Would it not be a good idea for the Government to take the initiative and call for an international conference to consider how countries can bear down on the trade? It must start there—we cannot keep the trade out any other way.

Margaret Beckett: My hon. Friend makes an interesting point. He will know of the many expressions of concern in various countries about the trade and that procedures exist to monitor and enforce the rules. Obviously, I will undertake to consider my hon. Friend's suggestion.

Mr. Russell Brown (Dumfries): I am delighted that my right hon. Friend has indicated that we are tightening up some of our systems. There is a feeling in the wider country that the Americans, Canadians and Australians have beaten the trade because their controls are very tight, but I believe that considerable smuggling still goes on in those nations. Can my right hon. Friend give us any idea of how much smuggling is still being carried out there?

Margaret Beckett: I am afraid that I do not have that information to hand, but my hon. Friend is certainly right to identify the fact that the relevant authorities in those countries are not by any means complacent about

the degree of success that they are experiencing. They share the concerns expressed in this country about our success in keeping on top of that trade.

David Burnside (South Antrim): The Secretary of State will remember that I welcomed the increase in expenditure for Customs and Excuse throughout the whole United Kingdom. However, we do not yet have evidence that the extra expenditure for seaports and airports in Great Britain is being allocated in Northern Ireland, where we also have a land border to protect. Will the right hon. Lady give the House a commitment that Northern Ireland, because it has a land border, will receive those extra resources and that the matter will not be passed on to the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, but will be borne by Customs and Excise?

Margaret Beckett: I cannot give the hon. Gentleman the precise commitment for which he asks, but I can certainly tell him that discussions are continuing about the way in which the extra resources will be allocated over the longer term. Those discussions are focused on the use that Customs and Excise will make of the resources. I undertake to pass his representations to the relevant authorities.

Paddy Tipping (Sherwood): Does the Secretary of State agree that any measures taken need to be proportionate and based on fact—information and research? She will remember that the action plan on illegal imports called for risk assessments. They were a key part of the plan and were due to be published in September. When will they be published?

Margaret Beckett: My hon. Friend is entirely right, both that action should be evidence based and that we have been awaiting a risk assessment. It has taken longer than we anticipated, as I think that I have already reported to the House, but some preliminary findings are emerging. They will be subject to quality assurance and peer review and we hope that they will be available before Christmas.

Mr. David Lidington (Aylesbury): Does the right hon. Lady recall that her action plan, published nearly eight months ago, stated that the Government would alter the wording on landing cards so that all incoming passengers knew that they were not supposed to bring meat or meat products into the United Kingdom? Can she say when she expects that pledge to be implemented?

Margaret Beckett: Not at this moment, although I share the hon. Gentleman's concern and I am genuinely glad that he asked that question. Since we held the overall meeting to discuss the preliminary action plan, one source of anxiety to me and to the Department has been that although, in principle, everybody shares the concerns expressed by the hon. Gentleman, it has not been easy to get the airlines, in particular, to agree to take the action that we want them to take, with regard both to landing cards and to the filler videos that we produced to warn people about the precautions they should take and the rules that they should observe. It has been difficult to get people to take those up, but we shall continue to maintain the pressure.

Mr. Lidington: Does the right hon. Lady not realise that it is becoming increasingly difficult for anybody in the farming or food industries to take seriously the pledges of a Government who, nearly 14 months after the end of the foot and mouth outbreak and eight months after their own much-vaunted action plan, are still completely incapable of delivering their pledges—whether on amnesty bins or landing cards? It is not enough for the right hon. Lady to express good will and good intent; it is about time that we saw some action from her Department.

Margaret Beckett: That was an interesting little rant but, unfortunately, it was not relevant to the facts. If the hon. Gentleman and his team, and indeed Conservative Back Benchers, would like a briefing about the action that is being taken and about some of the difficulties that are perceived, for example with the use of amnesty bins, I am happy to offer it. It is important that the House is well informed. The Select Committee indicated that the action plan was proceeding reasonably well, and I would not want to stretch its words further than that. The Government are continuing to work on the issues, but it is important that we do what will be effective and not merely what is currently fashionable.

Animal Movement Restrictions

4. **Mr. George Osborne** (Tatton): What recent representations she has received from the livestock industry about the 20-day rule. [81206]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mr. Elliot Morley): Industry organisations and individual farmers have made a number of representations about the impact of the 20-day standstill. Ministers and officials regularly meet industry representatives to discuss their views on the current movement controls.

Mr. Osborne: The 20-day standstill is causing enormous concern and hardship in the livestock industry. Mr. Gwyn Williams, a partner in Chelford livestock auction market in my constituency, recently wrote to me and said:

"All within the livestock industry will be grateful for your support in removing this ineffective but draconian legislation, which is of no practical use."

He has my support, but does he have the Minister's?

Mr. Morley: We have made it clear that we are commissioning independent assessments to consider the impact of the 20-day movement control on farmers. The vast majority of farmers can cope with the situation, but we accept that it does cause problems for some. We are sympathetic, but we cannot get away from the fact that the control has very strong veterinary support. It was recommended in Dr. Anderson's independent examination of the lessons to be learned and, indeed, by the Royal Society.

Hon. Members may also recall the case of the unmarked pig that had symptoms of foot and mouth disease. It has now been traced to two farmers, who have been fined for a range of offences in relation to traceability. That example shows that there is always a very real risk of spreading disease if we do not have movement controls.

Mr. Hugo Swire (East Devon): Given the closeness in date of the three main west country shows, the Minister will appreciate the problem caused by the fact that the closing dates for livestock entry, specifically that for sheep, all fall from the middle to the end of March. Will he therefore explain why the publication of the results of the risk analysis on biosecurity has been delayed from the end of January to the end of April? What advice can he give to the organisers of those shows, which are, of course, so critical to the economy of the south-west?

Mr. Morley: We are regularly in touch with the industry's representatives to address those issues. It is true that the risk assessment is very complex, but it needs to be thorough so that we can get right what we do in the long-term. However, I can assure the hon. Gentleman that, whatever decisions are taken about future movement controls, they will be taken in time and well before the spring movements start.

Mr. John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings): I know that the Minister will be stung by this week's cross-party foot and mouth inquiry, which accuses him and his colleagues of ineptitude, massive dereliction of duty and unpardonable delays in decision making. Will he make at least one quick decision on the 20-day rule? We know of the experience in Scotland, where it is applied more flexibly and exemptions are obtained more straightforwardly and more fairly. It is damaging to the industry, and it is not effective in restricting movement because farmers are forced to bend it, break it or go out of business. Will he learn that lesson? Will he take advice from the Opposition and the industry and apply the 20-day rule more flexibly for the sake of the livestock industry?

Mr. Morley: We listen very carefully to the industry, although I must inform the hon. Gentleman that the measures in place in England and Scotland are not at all dissimilar. The principal difference is that we ask that veterinary surgeons to examine farmers' biosecurity and separation arrangements. That is a very important step in ensuring that those things are done properly. Of course I have seen the report from the European temporary committee. It is a pity that it was altered by a political combination of Greens and Conservatives, who seemed to want to make political criticisms, rather than genuinely address the disease control lessons that we need to learn for the future.

Environmental Protection Act

5. **Siobhain McDonagh** (Mitcham and Morden): What plans she has to amend section 34 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990. [81207]

The Minister for the Environment (Mr. Michael Meacher): None. However, we are proposing to amend the Environmental Protection (Duty of Care) Regulations 1991, to grant waste collection authorities powers to serve notice on businesses, requiring them to produce their waste transfer notes. That should ensure better enforcement of the duty of care requirements.

Siobhain McDonagh: Does my right hon. Friend agree that, in the fight against fly tipping, it is very important not only that local authorities have the power to check on small businesses and their waste removal contracts, but that they are aware of their powers?

Mr. Meacher: I absolutely agree, and I acknowledge my hon. Friend's concerns and the actions that she is taking to try to improve the situation. As I have said, we believe that the right way to act with regard to the duty of care regulations is not to give local authorities access to the waste trade agreements because such documents are confidential between the waste contractor and the business that produces the waste. However, I entirely share her aim, and I hope that we can lay the regulations before the House very shortly and bring them into force in the early new year.

Norman Baker (Lewes): Will the Minister consider amending section 34 to help to deal with the problem of abandoned cars? I realise that the Government have taken steps to make it easier for local authorities to deal with this matter, but there was an epidemic of 238,000 abandoned vehicles last year, and the problem barely existed five years ago. Will he take steps to ensure that local authorities and police in particular try to identify those responsible and prosecute them?

Mr. Meacher: We have already taken action, as I am sure the hon. Gentleman knows, by reducing the period to 24 hours in the case of cars or vehicles that are assessed as not having value, and, in the case of those that do have value, no more than one week before enforcement action can be taken and the cars removed. As we know from Operation Cubitt in Newham and Kent, that has produced a vast reduction in the number of abandoned cars. We have also taken steps to ensure continuing registration of cars so that responsibility is placed firmly on the last owner who registers. If there is a change of ownership, and that is not registered, the last owner who did register remains responsible. We believe that those two measures will tackle what I agree is a very serious scourge of our streets.

Joan Ruddock (Lewisham, Deptford): I thank my right hon. Friend for the raft of measures that are in place, and that are being put in place. When he lays the regulations, however, will he further consider that local authorities are now frequently in a position, because of CCTV and co-operation from residents, to know when there are carriers on the road that are persistently fly tipping, although they do not have powers to deal with them? Will he consider extending to local authorities the power of street-stopping those vehicles and the power to impose fixed penalties on those that are carrying waste illegally?

Mr. Meacher: I am certainly keen to find ways of tackling fly tipping, which is a very serious offence and

a major problem. A fly tipping forum was set up, with our support, by the Environment Agency, and it is looking at ways in which perpetrators can be better caught. It has recently spent £250,000 on new equipment to do that, including the kind of proposals that my hon. Friend has suggested. Stopping vehicles to check whether what they are carrying is going to be tipped illegally is too difficult, however, because that cannot be proven. However, I am prepared to consider any further measures to deal with this menace.

Mr. Jonathan Sayeed (Mid-Bedfordshire): The Minister's answer to the hon. Member for Mitcham and Morden (Siobhain McDonagh) is regrettable, as fly tipping is an environmental scourge that blights both urban and rural Britain. It will get worse as landfill tax increases and the power to deal with the problem is divorced from the responsibility to deal with it. Why does he not have plans to invest in a single body—local authorities or the Environment Agency—the authority and the accountability to make the fly-tipping polluter pay for the harm that is caused to the environment, society and economy?

Mr. Meacher: The hon. Gentleman is strong on rhetoric, and I entirely share his purpose, but he was not listening to my answer. I indicated that amending section 34 of the Environmental Protection Act is not the appropriate way to proceed, as that would give local authorities access to the waste trade agreements, which, for the reason that I have given, is not appropriate. We are making the appropriate arrangements, however, which are to amend the Environmental Protection (Duty of Care) Regulations 1991. If he listened to me, he would understand that I share his purpose. We are dealing with the matter in the right way, and not in the wrong way that he suggests.

Common Agricultural Policy

6. **Mr. Ian Davidson** (Glasgow, Pollok): What progress she has made in reforming the Common Agricultural Policy of the EU during the last month. [81208]

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Margaret Beckett): A limit to CAP spending for the period 2007–13 has been agreed on a basis that the Commission sees as mandating it to continue with its main proposals for reform.

Mr. Davidson: Am I right in thinking that that was essentially a way of saying that progress this month, as in virtually every other month, has been negligible, and that the progress that the Government are making in their efforts, rightly, to reform the CAP continues to be negligible? Is it not about time that we accepted that the CAP is simply unreformable, that it is one of those areas in which modernisation is clearly not working, and that we must consider whether withdrawal from the CAP, or something similar, is the only possible alternative for us in such circumstances?

Margaret Beckett: I thought that I was going to agree with my hon. Friend, but I am afraid that I cannot conceivably join him where he finished up. It is not fair to say that progress has been negligible. It has made people look afresh at the details of the proposals that the Commission has introduced and that it will flesh out. That is a good thing.

Inevitably in these circumstances, many meetings and discussions have taken place further to identify where different member states stand, where there is common ground and where there is scope for agreement and so on. However, I certainly cannot agree with my hon. Friend that there is sense or merit in our withdrawing from the CAP, not least because we would be totally unable to do that unless we withdrew from the European Union.

Mr. Henry Bellingham (North-West Norfolk): When the Secretary of State goes through the discussions on the reform process, will she talk to her fellow socialist Members of the European Parliament? For example, will she ask about the recent European Parliament report on foot and mouth? Will she ask about the findings of incompetence and about a Government who were more concerned about the political implications of the crisis than about trying to solve it? Is it any wonder that she did not order a full public inquiry into the foot and mouth crisis? What is her comment on the European Parliament report?

Margaret Beckett: I do not need to talk to my socialist colleagues in the European Parliament about this matter. Long ago, they prepared what I understand to be a fairly sensible core report that did what the Committee was set up to do—consider what lessons there were for Europe as a whole as opposed to the lessons specifically for the United Kingdom. The people who were in a majority to force through the changes to which the hon. Gentleman referred were members of the Conservative party and the Green party. They worked hand in hand as they sought to turn the report into a rant against the British Government and not into something serious that Europe can use.

Mr. Mark Lazarowicz (Edinburgh, North and Leith): Does my right hon. Friend agree that one of the scandalous features of the CAP is the way that it—as well as ripping off British consumers—damages the livelihoods of producers in developing countries? Does she not agree that it really is time to stop the dumping of surplus European agricultural produce at subsidised prices in developing countries? Will she give a commitment that she will pursue that objective at the forthcoming Agriculture Council meeting and at the Heads of Government meetings over the next few weeks?

Margaret Beckett: I can certainly wholeheartedly give that commitment. I assure my hon. Friend that I have taken exactly that stance over the past few months at the Agriculture Council meetings and at the world conference in Johannesburg. I fully expect to continue taking it. He is entirely right. There is growing recognition of the problems that are exacerbated by the structures of the CAP with regard to the developing

world. I entirely share his view that it is hugely important that we lay the foundation for ameliorating those problems.

Andrew George (St. Ives): Does the Secretary of State agree that, to secure the much-desired rapid reform of the common agricultural policy, she may need to engage in further stand-up rows with her European colleagues, particularly in the light of the obvious cynical manipulation by France of legal proceedings so that it can avoid paying the hefty fine imposed on it for its entirely unacceptable and illegal ban on the importation of British beef?

Margaret Beckett: I am always willing, should it prove necessary, to have stand-up rows if that is the only way to get one's own way. However, I have consistently sought throughout my political career and in my role as a Minister to do what is effective. Having a stand-up row is sometimes not the most effective way to get one's way on behalf of one's country. However, I assure the hon. Gentleman that, if getting up and shouting at someone is required, I am quite happy to do that.

Mr. George Stevenson (Stoke-on-Trent, South): Although I recognise what my right hon. Friend says about progress being made on reform of the CAP, does she agree that the basic and unacceptable principles of the CAP remain in place? Despite the cap on spending over the next few years that she mentioned, is it not the case that, if the principles of the CAP remain in place, the budgetary consequences of lack of reform will be unacceptable in the light of enlargement?

Margaret Beckett: I agree with my hon. Friend. It has long been the case that people across Europe have appreciated the many problems associated with the CAP. Many of those problems persist. I also agree that the implications of applying the CAP to an enlarged Community are serious and substantial. It is a matter not only of the financial implications—although those are considerable, as he said—but of applying what is a bureaucratic, time-consuming, and frequently counterproductive structure to a fresh raft of member states. For those reasons, it is important to pursue reform, as we shall continue to do.

Fisheries

7. **Mr. Alistair Carmichael** (Orkney and Shetland): If she will make a statement on the present difficulties facing the fishing industry. [81209]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mr. Elliot Morley): While recognising the impact on the industry, firm action is needed to halt the decline in fish stocks. The Government are working to identify possible alternatives to an extensive moratorium on fishing activities while respecting the need to act in response to the scientific advice.

Mr. Carmichael: Does the Minister consider it acceptable that the EU Commission can propose the closure of the white fish fishery without paying regard to the conservation measures introduced—the use of square-mesh panels and larger mesh sizes, and the decommissioning of 20 white fish boats in Scotland? If that is not acceptable, what is he going to do about it?

Mr. Morley: We are to debate these issues in detail this afternoon. The hon. Gentleman would be wrong to think that we would agree to any measure without taking into account what has been done by the Scottish and English fleets. We have not been able to do that so far, but there is a great deal of negotiation to take place, and analysis and interpretation of the science needs to be done. I know that the hon. Gentleman and representatives of the industry recently met my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland. I also know that the Scottish Executive have debated the issue extensively, and we are working in close partnership with them. We have done much to reduce effort, and I assure the hon. Gentleman that it will be taken into account in the calculations.

Lawrie Quinn (Scarborough and Whitby): Does my hon. Friend agree with Arnold Locker, a Whitby fisherman and chairman of the National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations, when he says that if enforcement measures that apply to Yorkshire fishermen were applied across Europe to ensure that policies were delivered, we might not be in the same position?

Mr. Morley: I agree with Mr. Locker that it is important that effective enforcement measures apply to all member states consistently across Europe. We will argue for the inclusion of that objective in a package of measures on cod recovery and common fisheries policy reform. There have been cases of rule breaking that are not unique to any one country or sector of the industry. Anyone who has been involved in that undermines scientific analysis and attempts at genuine conservation.

Mr. Mark Simmonds (Boston and Skegness): Will the Minister investigate the workings of the eastern sea fisheries committee over the past five years? There have been enormous problems with it and serious allegations of major impropriety. The fishermen whom the committee is supposed to represent and monitor have completely lost of confidence in it, especially those in my constituency who work out of Boston.

Mr. Morley: The hon. Gentleman will know that although I meet the Association of Sea Fisheries Committees and believe that the committees are important and valuable organisations, responsibility for the committees rests with local authorities. They are local committees, run by local authorities and representing local fishermen. I am aware of some of the problems that he has experienced with the committee, and we have corresponded on that. I listen carefully to points raised, especially in relation to a balance of representation, but any claim of impropriety is a matter for local authorities to investigate.

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): I congratulate my hon. Friend on being the most experienced and effective fisheries Minister in the whole of the United Kingdom—*[Laughter.]* The Liberals will understand what I mean.

Does my hon. Friend agree that it takes a miracle to replace the fish that have been scourged from the sea in cases of overfishing? Surely those of us who represent fishing constituencies have a responsibility not only to argue the case to Ministers, but to warn our constituents of the dangers of overfishing. We should not raise false hopes.

Mr. Morley: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. We must have effective enforcement, which of course starts at home. However, we must also look at the impact on our seas of all fishing fleets. We need to take into account other aspects, such as industrial fishing and whether or not they are sustainable and have a long-term impact on fish stocks. I know that many Members share an interest in that issue.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): I welcome the fact that the Minister has just challenged the report by the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea on industrial fishing. I have that, that challenge extends to other aspects of the report. However, will he communicate to the Prime Minister the fact that it is not just the troops who are demoralised? The fishing communities in Scotland, Northern Ireland and the north of England are demoralised by the Prime Minister's apparent indifference to a crisis that threatens thousands of jobs. How does the fisheries Minister plan to engage the Government at the highest level to resist the total lunacy of the European Commission?

Mr. Morley: First, the Government are engaged at the highest level to represent the needs of our fishing communities. We well understand the regional importance of the fishing industry and the implications and consequences of such changes. We cannot, however, deny the science. We must take it into account, but we must also challenge it. I make it clear to the House that the United Kingdom Government will not sign up to any issue until we have a clear understanding of any proposals and their justification. The restriction of the nephrops fishery, for example, was originally proposed because of the cod by-catch. The hon. Gentleman will be aware that we have done a great deal of scientific work on the cod by-catch in the North sea fishery. It is minimal, and he will note that calls for restriction have now been withdrawn by the Commission.

Foundry Industry

8. **Mr. Adrian Bailey** (West Bromwich, West): How the capacity thresholds for the pollution prevention control regulations in the foundry industry are assessed; and if she will make a statement. [81210]

The Minister for the Environment (Mr. Michael Meacher): The regulations prescribe various capacity thresholds for different activities, including for the foundry industry, and derive from the EC directive on integrated pollution prevention and control. In assessing permit applications, regulators will determine the capacity of an installation on a case-by-case basis. The starting point is the operator's description of the installation.

Mr. Bailey: I thank my right hon. Friend for his reply. There are concerns, particularly among small foundries, that they are being assessed on the basis of a theoretical 24-hour production capacity when in fact they have neither the moulding nor the cleaning capacity to operate for more than eight hours. As a result, the extra regulations would incur considerably increased costs, which could put some of them out of business. Will my right hon. Friend undertake to work with the small foundries to ensure that they are not inappropriately regulated?

Mr. Meacher: I am happy to do so and consider the matter further. The precise definition of capacity thresholds is set out in the regulations. Operators should be clear whether they are subject to the full integrated pollution prevention and control regulations or, if they run the smaller operations about which my hon. Friend is concerned, only to air pollution controls. I repeat that the starting point for assessing an installation's capacity on a case-by-case basis is the operator's own description, but if there are problems that can be resolved under the regulations that are binding on all member states, I am happy to look at the details.

Sheep Dips

10. **Mr. Elfyn Llwyd** (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy): When she last discussed the efficacy of continued use of organophosphate sheep dips with representatives of (a) the medical profession and (b) the pharmaceutical industry. [81212]

The Minister for Rural Affairs (Alun Michael): The Veterinary Products Committee has considered the question of continued authorisation of organophosphate sheep dips on a number of occasions. Its most recent advice on that issue, provided in October, was that no new regulatory action was necessary at that time.

Mr. Llwyd: I thank the Minister for his reply, which is not encouraging. Over the past five years, compelling evidence has built up of the link between organophosphate toxins and the debilitating disease that they cause. For 10 years, there has been an all-party group on the issue. Is it not the case that the Government refuse to do anything until they are dragged kicking and screaming to the High Court, as happened with the miners' compensation issue?

Alun Michael: The hon. Gentleman mixes two inappropriate comments. Following Government intervention, all OP sheep dips are now supplied in containers with enclosed transfer systems. A number of measures have been taken to ensure safety, and the advice of the specialists is as I stated in the reply to the hon. Gentleman's first question.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): Does the Minister accept that the Government have a special responsibility to the victims of OP poisoning, because for many years

those who were using OPs had to use them on Government instructions? Their use was not voluntary. The sheep dip was not simply an approved product; it was compulsory. Does the Minister therefore accept that there is a special responsibility to secure justice for those victims?

Alun Michael: The Government have a responsibility to act on the best scientific advice. The original question was about the continuation of use, and it remains the view that there is currently no scientific justification for banning OP sheep dips. On the basis of the advice, precautionary measures to ensure people's safety have been taken by the Government.

Livestock Industry

11. **Mr. Bill Wiggin** (Leominster): What assessment she has made of the effectiveness of the biosecurity regulations governing the livestock industry. [81215]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mr. Elliot Morley): Extra biosecurity rules introduced in the aftermath of the foot and mouth disease outbreak are kept under review. Although standards of biosecurity have improved in some respects, there is no room for complacency.

Mr. Wiggin: I welcome the action plan for the briefing session mentioned earlier. It is true that the 20-day rule has been adhered to extremely conscientiously by farmers, and I find it very positive that Customs and Excise will try to prevent smuggling, but will the Minister do more to prevent double standards being inflicted on farmers? We know that the Government are not bringing in amnesty bins and landing cards, and it strikes me as most unfair that when farmers are doing their very best on biosecurity the Government are not doing what they should be doing to support them.

Mr. Morley: That is not the case. We accept that if we are trying to minimise the risk of disease, we must tackle various aspects of the problem. That must include borders and points of entry. We have introduced measures, as the hon. Gentleman knows, and we want to do more. We must identify exactly where the risks are, and a risk assessment is currently under development. The Government accept our responsibilities—for example, for border control—but the livestock industry must recognise that it, too, has responsibilities to reduce the risk of disease, and that involves movement restrictions. We will discuss in due course whether the 20-day restriction is appropriate, but there must be restrictions and they must be permanent.

Mr. Roger Williams (Brecon and Radnorshire): The Minister will be aware of the criticism of the number of officials who are employed in livestock markets and collection centres to oversee biosecurity measures. Would not some of those people be better employed at airports and seaports to ensure that exotic animal diseases do not enter this country?

Mr. Morley: Again, it is a question of risk and where resources are best applied. If we do not think carefully about where the risks are, we could deploy a great deal of money, resources and people power, and not reduce risk. By their nature, livestock markets, where animals intermingle, are an area of extremely high risk, so biosecurity must apply. Markets recognise that and we acknowledge the work that they have done to reduce risk.

Biofuels

12. **Mr. David Cameron** (Witney): What representations she has received about tax treatment of biodiesel and other biofuels; and if she will make a statement. [81216]

The Minister for the Environment (Mr. Michael Meacher): The Government have received representations from industry, farmers and members of the public, both at meetings and in correspondence, requesting duty cuts for liquid biofuels. As with all tax matters, decisions on tax incentives rest with the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Mr. Cameron: I wish the right hon. Gentleman well in his conversations with the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Is it not a fact that with farm incomes low and with the widespread concern about the waste of set-aside, biofuels—biodiesel—represent an excellent opportunity for farmers and for the environment? Is not the tax treatment of such fuels in other European countries, slightly more generous than in our country? Would the Minister please take that up with the Chancellor, preferably before next week?

Mr. Meacher: I am keen to support agricultural diversification. Liquid biofuels have tremendous potential. The Government have set up the Government-industry forum on non-food uses of crops to investigate that potential. The Government have already taken action to promote the production of biofuels. As a result of the green fuels challenge, a new duty rate for biodiesel was set at 20p per litre below the rate for ultra-low sulphur diesel. I am well aware of the argument that that rate needs to be lower. As I said, I hear the argument and the matter is one for the Chancellor. On the comparison with Europe, the 20p reduction is almost the average for the European Union; it is slightly below that level. I recognise that if the industry is to be viable and not only develop used vegetable oil, which is already coming forward, the argument must be very carefully looked at.

Mr. Peter Pike (Burnley): Will my right hon. Friend give an assurance that he will continue to consider this matter in a very positive way? It must be recognised that, as we need to make changes in agricultural production to meet those in the common agricultural policy, the development of biofuels is an environmentally positive way of proceeding that deals with several situations at the same time. We should encourage agriculture and the National Farmers Union to work in that direction.

Mr. Meacher: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend—this is a win-win situation in many respects. We are discussing a form of agricultural diversification that will certainly create more agricultural jobs and will produce

an alternative transport fuel that is much more environmentally sensitive. The issue—this has to be the issue—is that it has to be cost-effective. If further duty cuts are made, they will of course involve a reduction in revenue for the Exchequer. The opportunity costs of making those reductions as opposed to others are the essential issue that the Government have to bear in mind.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): Does the right hon. Gentleman understand the frustration that is currently felt in the industry about the lack of leadership from the Government on this matter? People cannot plant crops unless they are sure that there is a processing plant to take the crops, and they cannot develop processing plants unless they know that there is a market for the fuel. Can he not see that much greater leadership needs to be shown, not only by his Department but by the Treasury?

Mr. Meacher: It is not only a question of showing political leadership, as this is not a matter of political will. I was trying to tell the House that a cost is involved and that the process has to be cost-effective. Those are the calculations that the Treasury rightly has to make in considering the best way of using taxpayers' money, whether to promote an alternative form of agriculture, a new transport fuel or a reduction in greenhouse gases. I think that it can make a contribution in all those respects, but the hon. Gentleman needs to contain his frustration. The arguments are fully understood by the Government and I suggest that he wait to see what the Chancellor says in his pre-Budget report.

Egg Industry

13. **Sir Nicholas Winterton** (Macclesfield): What steps she has taken to ensure the future viability of the UK egg-laying industry. [81217]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mr. Elliot Morley): DEFRA is committed to promoting sustainable, diverse, modern and adaptable farming. The egg-laying industry is an important part of that objective.

Sir Nicholas Winterton: While I am grateful to the Minister for that apparently helpful reply, does he recognise that a prohibition on enriched cages in England after 2012 would result in egg imports from other parts of the United Kingdom and other European countries where the use of such cages has already been authorised? If the cages are prohibited after 2012, it will do absolutely nothing for animal welfare. Will he give the industry an assurance that enriched cages will be authorised?

Mr. Morley: The Government have held [illegible] and detailed consultation, as the hon. Gentleman knows, about whether it would be appropriate to permit enriched cages post-2012. We have implemented the directive in full and in an unchanged form, but it is discretionary whether member states allow the cages to be used after that date. I believe that it is important that we consider the issue as early as possible to allow the industry time to consider its future investment options.

I understand the hon. Gentleman's point about the potential for competition from other countries that are not applying such systems. Some European countries have already said that they intend to prohibit such systems. However, we take the point seriously, and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State was successful in obtaining a statement at Doha that world trade would take account of non-trade matters, precisely because of issues such as those that affect the egg industry. I shall not ignore the hon. Gentleman's point because we must take it into account.

Electronic Equipment

14. **Dr. Alan Whitehead** (Southampton, Test): For what elements of the implementation of the waste electrical and electronic equipment directive the Department is responsible. [81218]

The Minister for the Environment (Mr. Michael Meacher): The Department of Trade and Industry is leading on negotiations of the WEEE directive, which is due to be approved by the Environment Council in December. Both the DTI and DEFRA are holding several focus group meetings with stakeholders on WEEE implementation. DEFRA takes the lead in implementing article 6 on permitting treatment facilities.

Dr. Whitehead: I thank my right hon. Friend for that reply. Will he ensure that the front-end responsibilities of producers of electrical and electronic goods are properly related to those of waste disposal authorities when the directive is implemented in the United Kingdom?

Mr. Meacher: Certainly. DEFRA remains in correspondence with the DTI about which Department should take the lead in the WEEE directive's implementation. We shall consider the strategy unit report when it is published shortly. It is important to ensure co-operation between both Departments because DEFRA leads on local authorities and dismantlers when implementing article 6, and the DTI plays a lead role in respect of retailers and manufacturers. Both should have clear responsibilities with regard to waste disposal authorities.

Bovine TB

15. **Mr. Huw Edwards** (Monmouth): If she will make a statement on levels of cases of bovine TB. [81220]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mr. Elliot Morley): The number of new TB herd incidents recorded for Great Britain between 1 January and 30 September 2002 stands at just under 2,300, of which 417 are in Wales. That includes confirmed, unconfirmed and unclassified incidents.

Mr. Edwards: In Monmouthshire, there have been 90 suspected cases, of which a third have already been confirmed. That causes considerable frustration to livestock farmers, who are affected by the increased costs of movement restrictions. Will my hon. Friend assure us that every effort is being made to resolve the crisis? When will the Krebs trials be completed and a vaccine developed?

Mr. Morley: I understand my hon. Friend's anxiety about bovine TB; we take it seriously. He knows that we recently allocated an additional £3 million to catch up with the backlog of testing that resulted from the foot-and-mouth outbreak. Testing was, of course, impossible then. The work has distorted the outbreak figures because we are testing in the most high risk areas first, and the figures that we get will not be representative of the spread and increase in bovine TB. Nevertheless, there is no room for complacency.

My hon. Friend knows that I recently announced a package of measures about changes in movement control. They are designed to help farmers who are under restriction because of TB.

Mr. Roy Beggs (East Antrim): Is there any correlation between the increase in bovine TB and that in human TB?

There is a perception that badgers contribute to the spread of bovine TB. What analysis has been undertaken to determine whether badgers play a part in spreading the terrible disease?

Mr. Morley: The hon. Gentleman is right about the latter point. There has been a long-running debate about the link between badgers and bovine TB. It has gone on for approximately 20 years. The Krebs experiment is a five-year programme designed to consider the link and ascertain its importance once and for all. It is an important experiment that we must see through to completion.

There are two strains of TB—bovine and human. Human TB is therefore a different strain. The increase in it is due to the fact that people travel more widely. It is caused by global travel, not an increase in the cattle herd.

Non-food Crops

16. **Alistair Burt** (North-East Bedfordshire): What proposals she intends to bring forward to support the promotion of non-food crops in the UK. [81221]

The Minister for the Environment (Mr. Michael Meacher): DEFRA and the Department of Trade and Industry are consulting stakeholders on establishing a new centre to bring together industry, academia and the research community to drive forward the commercial development of non-food uses of crops. DEFRA and the DTI are also considering a joint initiative to provide grant support to promote technology transfer through demonstration projects. The Government have allocated £70 million to develop markets for biomass in heat, combined heat and power, and power generation.

Alistair Burt: Is the Minister aware of the excellent campaign being run by *Farmers Weekly* to draw attention to the non-food use of crops? Does he not feel some sympathy for its sense of a lack of urgency on the part of the Government? With such terrible prices being paid in the arable sector, the non-food use of crops—which has been on the cards for some time—could have been given rather more attention by the Government than it has been up to now.

Mr. Meacher: I am very keen to make progress on this, as I said in answer to an earlier question. This is an important area for agricultural diversification. We set up the forum on the non-food use of crops in March last year to give us strategic advice, and it has now done so. We intend to respond to the forum's recommendations in early 2003. The centre of excellence that we propose to set up, which brings together the existing facilities in one central core, is a very good way forward. I am very keen that we should make real progress in this area.

Business of the House

12.31 pm

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): May I please ask the Leader of the House to give us the business for next week?

The Leader of the House of Commons (Mr. Robin Cook): The business for next week is as follows:

MONDAY 25 NOVEMBER—There will be a debate on the UN Security Council Resolution 1441.

TUESDAY 26 NOVEMBER—Second Reading of the Regional Assemblies (Preparations) Bill.

WEDNESDAY 27 NOVEMBER—Second Reading of the Health (Wales) Bill.

THURSDAY 28 NOVEMBER—Second Reading of the Community Care (Delayed Discharges etc.) Bill.

FRIDAY 29 NOVEMBER—The House will not be sitting.

The House will also wish to be reminded that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer will deliver his pre-Budget report on Wednesday 27 November.

The provisional business for the following week will be:

MONDAY 2 DECEMBER—Until 7 o'clock there will be an Opposition half day. There will be a debate in the name of the Democratic Unionist Party on a subject to be announced. [HON. MEMBERS: "Guess!"] I would not dream of taking up such an invitation.

That will be followed by a debate on the convention on the future of Europe.

TUESDAY 3 DECEMBER—Second Reading of the Communications Bill.

WEDNESDAY 4 DECEMBER—Second Reading of the Criminal Justice Bill.

THURSDAY 5 DECEMBER—Estimates [1st allotted Day].

There will be a debate on the Government's drugs policy. Details will be given in the *Official Report*.

At 7 pm the House will be asked to agree all outstanding estimates.

FRIDAY 6 DECEMBER—The House will not be sitting.

I should also like to inform the House that the business in Westminster Hall for Thursday 5 December will be a debate on the report from the International Development Committee on global climate change and sustainable development.

Mr. Forth: I thank the Leader of the House for giving us the business. We are all aware that the long-awaited and much-anticipated Wicks report reached the public domain this morning. At this stage, may I put down a marker and ask the right hon. Gentleman whether he will guarantee that, at an appropriate time and after deliberations in the House, we will have an opportunity fully to debate the report, which has such a huge impact on the House and the way in which it works, and on its Members?

The Leader of the House may or may not be aware—I do not know how assiduously even he follows the proceedings of the European Parliament—that yesterday the European Parliament produced a report on foot and mouth disease, which, in distinction to the rather dismal effort made in this country, was produced on the basis of public hearings. Will the right hon. Gentleman tell us whether he is prepared to give time—probably early in the new year—for a debate on foot and mouth that will allow us to consider not only the findings of the final version of the European Parliament report but all the other investigations into that important subject, so that we can come to a proper conclusion?

Following the pre-Budget report next Wednesday, I hope that we shall have an opportunity soon thereafter for a full debate on the economy because it would appear from all reports that we are receiving that the gloss has gone off the Chancellor in particular. Following what he tells us in his pre-Budget report, we shall want to consider the state of the economy and of the Government's finances very carefully. Perhaps we shall see the Chancellor in an altogether new light. That would be an uplifting experience, certainly for those on the Conservative Benches, and it should happen in any case.

I want to ask the Leader of the House about the crisis in higher education. Is there such a crisis? The Minister for Lifelong Learning and Higher Education has told us that there is, which worries me, as I am sure it does you, Mr. Speaker, because we have all been brought up to believe in the doctrine of Government collective responsibility—a very important part of our constitutional and parliamentary arrangements. This Government, however, do not seem to have any collective responsibility, because the Secretary of State for Education and Skills and the Minister for Lifelong Learning and Higher Education are busy flying kites on top-up tuition fees in higher education, while no less a figure than the Secretary of State for International Development has said that they are a bad idea.

Here we have two Cabinet members plus other Ministers all saying completely different things about an important policy area. Will the Leader of the House please arrange a debate on Government collective responsibility so that we can find out once and for all whether the Government have any collective view about anything at all or whether there is a permanent free-for-all in the Cabinet on important areas of responsibility?

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): Unite or die!

Mr. Speaker: Order.

Mr. Forth: I ask also for an urgent debate entitled "Honesty and Integrity in Government". The key figure in that debate, perhaps to everybody's surprise, would be Admiral Sir Michael Boyce—a man whose honesty and integrity are unimpeachable, a man for whom all of us on the Conservative Benches have the highest possible regard and a man whose word can be accepted without question on our Benches.

It appears, however, that things are rather different on the Government side. Sadly, when the admiral was asked yesterday about the impact on the effectiveness of the armed forces of their preparations for and

[Mr. Forth]

involvement in the firefighters' strike, he said, "I am extremely concerned". He is reported as going on to say that

"clearly we cannot perform at the fullest end of our operational capability".

That is the Chief of the Defence Staff stating his assessment of the impact of our domestic situation on our armed forces. In the light of that, the Secretary of State for Defence is reported as saying:

"I didn't actually hear him say 'extreme concern'."

Rather than have a debate, perhaps we should offer the Secretary of State an analysis of his hearing capability, because for the two to be at such odds is a serious matter.

It gets worse, because at column 639 of yesterday's *Hansard*, during PMPs—*[Interruption.]* Yes, Prime Minister's porkies. The Prime Minister was told that

"the Chief of the Defence Staff expressed his considerable concerns about what he described in this context as the present military effectiveness of the British armed forces in this respect."

The Prime Minister replied:

"The Chief of the Defence Staff did not say that."

The Prime Minister is now challenging the Chief of the Defence Staff on what he said. The Prime Minister went on to say that

"he said that we would have the full operational capability for any requirement that might be made of us."—[*Official Report*, 20 November 2002; Vol. 394, c. 639.]

But the Chief of the Defence Staff had just said that we did not have the full operational capability.

We must have a debate on this matter, Mr. Speaker. It cannot be left hanging in the air, because it goes to the heart not only of integrity and honesty in government, of which there seems to be precious little these days, but of the relationship between this country's top military man and members of the Cabinet. We must have a debate and we must sort this out once and for all.

Mr. Cook: Before I respond to the right hon. Gentleman's questions, may I allude to a question he asked me last week about the number of written statements and the time when they were released? I am pleased to say that today there will again be 10 written statements, nine of which were laid before the business statement. The one exception is the statement on victims and witnesses, which the Home Office understandably wants to release at the same time as the publication of the Criminal Justice Bill at 2.30 this afternoon. I hope that the House will take some comfort from the fact that we are doing all we can to ensure that written statements are provided timeously, and that the House can benefit from a more transparent and open way of making announcements.

I have not yet had a chance to read all of the Wicks report, but I welcome one of its early conclusions:

"We believe that standards in the House of Commons are generally high. The overwhelming majority of Members seek to, and in practice do, uphold high standards of propriety."

I trust that I carry the House with me when I express the hope that tomorrow the press will give adequate coverage to that central conclusion of the Wicks committee.

The right hon. Gentleman is right—the House must have an opportunity to examine the report—but I would have thought that the appropriate time was when we had had an opportunity to reflect and to digest it. I would particularly like to know the views of the Standards and Privileges Committee before the House discusses it.

I think it would be slightly eccentric to debate a European Parliament report on foot and mouth when we already have a number of reports of our own, in Britain, about what happened. I am conscious of the deep interest in the matter, and we are keeping it in mind for a future debate; but, as the right hon. Gentleman pointed out, from now until the end of the year we shall have a very busy schedule, especially in dealing with Second Readings of the many excellent Bills in the Queen's Speech.

The right hon. Gentleman mentioned the state of the economy. I was a little perplexed to be pressed for a debate on that, given that, for the first time in my memory, the Opposition chose not to divide on the economy at the end of our debates on the Queen's Speech. That may of course reflect their recognition that they are not on the strongest ground when it comes to a record on the economy that has given us the lowest inflation and interest rates for a generation—since the time of the Beatles, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) said in his speech—and a lower unemployment rate than any other major economy in Europe. I assure the right hon. Gentleman that the gloss is still fully on the Chancellor, and that he looks forward with confidence to coming here on Wednesday and robustly defending the Government's economic record.

Let me also say this to my—to the right hon. Gentleman. I nearly called him my right hon. Friend, and would not necessarily resile from that but for its parliamentary connotations. I think it took a bit of brass neck for him to lecture the Government on the principle of collective responsibility. Only in the past week have we seen him restored to his place in the Chamber so that we can see his face again. Let me gently suggest that this may be an instance in which those in glass houses might hesitate before throwing stones.

As the House knows, preparation is currently being made for a review of higher education, which will be published in the new year. I am sure that when it is published the House will want to debate it, and explore the options that it presents.

There will of course be a debate on Iraq next week, when the House, if it wishes, will be able to discuss the military preparedness of the armed forces for any conflict that may arise. Of course everyone, whether in the military or not, would like the fire strike threatened for tomorrow not to take place. That is why my right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister has been working so hard to find a basis on which talks and negotiations can continue. We strongly urge the parties to the dispute to remain at the negotiating table rather than take strike action, but I am confident that if they take such action the armed forces and other personnel will do all that they can to try to provide the best possible alternative cover, and will rise to the task with no complaints.

Mr. Paul Tyler (North Cornwall): Did the Leader of the House notice that the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) endorsed the question to the Prime Minister from my right hon. Friend the Member for Ross, Skye and Inverness, West (Mr. Kennedy) yesterday rather than supporting his own leader? Does that not show where the real opposition is?

On the Wicks committee, I wonder whether the Leader of the House would like to comment on the fact that the report on the standards of conduct of the House of Commons—a report that could not be more relevant to Members of Parliament—was presented to the media at 11 am this morning, but was not available to Members until 11.20 because of "a technical hitch". Moreover, the written statement from the Prime Minister was not available in the Library until 11.30. Surely on this occasion at least, Members of the House should be given priority. Will the Leader of the House accept that the intention behind the Modernisation Committee's proposal that we should do away with the farcical charade of question planters was to give the whole House such information at the earliest possible opportunity? Does he accept that simply leaving it to the Standards and Privileges Committee to come back to the House with a review of the Wicks committee report will not be sufficient? After all, that Committee is itself under some attack from the recommendations of the Wicks committee.

Has the Leader of the House had time to consider Mr. Speaker's statement of yesterday, in response to a point of order from my hon. Friend the Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb) about the obligation of Ministers and their Departments to give full, honest and accurate answers to parliamentary questions? Has the Leader of the House considered the particular point made by Mr. Speaker that he hoped that steps would be taken

"to ensure that that does not happen again."—[*Official Report*, 20 November 2002; Vol. 394, c. 645.]?

Will the Leader of the House examine, across the whole of Government, examples that my colleagues and I have discovered of the way in which the parliamentary question has been debased by some Departments?

Finally, I ask the Leader of the House whether there could be pre-legislative scrutiny of the civil service legislation that we still hope to see in this Session—even if only in draft form—given that the Wicks committee's work on the politicisation of civil servants is intensely relevant to the reputation of this Government and this Parliament.

Mr. Cook: The decision on the release of the Wicks committee report was in the first instance a matter for that committee—it was in its hands to decide when it chose to publish it. I regret that the report was not simultaneously available in the Vote Office, and we did take steps to make sure that it was made available as quickly as possible. I regret the delay, and I must be frank with the House and say that, at the time of coming to the Chamber, I was unable to get to the bottom of the reason for that delay. I shall pursue the matter when I leave the Chamber, but the report is now available in the Vote Office, and is available to hon. Members.

I should say that I did not imply that a report from the Standards and Privileges Committee would itself be sufficient, but I do think it desirable. I would hope that, before we have what will necessarily be a wide-ranging discussion in the House, involving Members who are not necessarily members of that Committee, the Committee and its Chairman should advise us on how we should proceed, and on how we should assess the recommendations.

I vigorously rebut the idea that the parliamentary answer has been in any way debased. Indeed, only in the past month or two, I made a submission to the Procedure Committee, robustly defending the parliamentary answers provided by Government. There are of course occasions when they are not adequate, and for that reason an apology was given this week to Mr. Speaker, and to the hon. Gentleman's colleague, the hon. Member for Northavon (Mr. Webb). We shall seek to do all that we can to prevent any further administrative mix-up that results in the wrong information being provided to a Member. However, I ask the House to bear in mind that the volume of parliamentary answers has almost doubled in the course of this Parliament since the last election. We are seeking to cope with the very welcome interest of Members in the work of government and the excellent work that we are doing, but sometimes that is challenging.

I note what the hon. Gentleman says about bringing forward civil service legislation in draft form. I understand why he proposes that—there would be considerable interest in such legislation. Whether we will have such legislation in this Session I am currently not in a position to say, but I shall bear in mind the view that, should such legislation be brought forward, it might be helpful, if circumstances allow, for it to be seen in draft.

Ann McKechin (Glasgow, Maryhill): My right hon. Friend will be aware of the sale of the Herald Newspaper Group by the Scottish Media Group, and of the deep concern of many that one of the bidders is the Barclay brothers, owners of *The Scotsman*. May I ask my right hon. Friend to provide time in the House to discuss the future of newspaper media in Scotland, and in particular to discuss the developing monopoly situation and how competition policy can seek to broaden the range of the available newspaper media in Scotland?

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend raises a matter of considerable interest in Scotland. I am sure that it will be a considerable talking point at next week's dinner organised by *The Herald*, at which many hon. Members will be present.

Mr. Forth: Oh!

Mr. Cook: I do not think that our independence of judgment on this question will be suborned, but we will wish to seek views, and it is possible that we will even express views in the course of that dinner. My hon. Friend is right that one of the objectives that we should try to achieve in the media is to ensure that there is competition and an alternative point of view. Anyone who knows of the long-standing rivalry between Edinburgh and Glasgow will be aware of the importance of those two cities having distinct daily newspapers to cover their populations. My hon. Friend has alluded to the fact that there exist well known and well worn

[Mr. Cook]

systems by which we can ensure that any merger in the media industry is subject to adequate competition checks.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield): I agree with the Leader of the House about the Wicks report, and I understand that neither he nor anyone else has had a chance to reflect fully on its recommendations. However, I draw the right hon. Gentleman's attention to paragraph 15 of the report, which states:

"We have recommended ... that no party should have an overall majority on the Committee"

on Standards and Privileges. To many hon. Members, that seems a good idea. May I urge the Leader of the House to consider it most carefully?

Mr. Cook: I have the highest regard for all those who serve on the Standards and Privileges Committee. They are not on it to follow any party line, and no party line is ever given to them. They serve as hon. Members with independent minds, and often show robust independence. That is to be welcomed. I would hesitate to introduce a party quota system in that Committee, and to place on the official Opposition the burden of providing even more members of Committees, when they plainly have so much difficulty in finding enough Back Benchers to staff present requirements.

David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire): In relation to the question from the hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr. Mitchell), I believe that all reports from the Standards and Privileges Committee have been unanimous.

My question concerns the launch by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport on 23 July of a long consultation on the future of British aviation. The consultation period ends in nine days, on 30 November. Many of my constituents have had great difficulty in obtaining the appropriate documentation for the submission of their views. The Department of Transport has resolutely refused to extend the consultation period. Has my right hon. Friend had any intimation from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport that there will be time for a debate between 30 November and the rising of the House four weeks today? Such a debate would allow us to look at some of the issues associated with this very flawed consultation period.

Mr. Cook: I must disabuse the House of the idea that there will be many free days in the period to which my hon. Friend refers. However, I fully understand the enormous importance of this issue to many constituents and to many hon. Members. The consultation period has gone on for four months already, which is significantly longer than the standard period. I can understand why my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Transport should feel that the time may have come to draw that consultation to a close, but that will not and cannot be the end of the debate. I am very much aware that hon. Members will want to continue to contribute to the debate on the options that may be selected, and that from time to time it will be necessary for views to be aired in the Chamber.

Mr. John Redwood (Wokingham): Will the Education Secretary come to the House to say why, with our EU partners, he has signed up to five very important targets for our education system up to 2010? Those targets will limit our right to fashion education policy in this House. Will he also ask the Transport Secretary to come to the House to comment on rumours that our open skies agreement with the US is now deemed illegal and will have to be denounced by the Government?

Mr. Cook: I welcome any opportunity for my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Skills to come to the House and remind hon. Members of the Government's success in attaining the targets for education in the UK that the Government set. For example, we inherited a situation where many infant school classes had more than 30 children, and we have resolved that problem. We have also achieved the best ever literacy and numeracy levels in primary schools, and the best ever GCSE results. In addition, we have the largest ever number of students going into higher education. All those targets were made in Britain and delivered in Britain by this Government.

Keith Vaz (Leicester, East): Will the Leader of the House arrange for a debate on competition policy following the decision by Tesco to merge with T and S stores, which will have a serious effect on local convenience stores in my constituency and in those of other right hon. and hon. Members? This is a matter for the Office of Fair Trading, which has extended the time to consider a referral for a competition inquiry, but surely the House can debate these matters in the meantime.

Mr. Cook: It is of course entirely open to hon. Members to express their views and my hon. Friend has found an ingenious way of putting his view on the record. He is correct that the matter is before the director general of fair trading, who will consider whether to make a report to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry. In the meantime, it would be inappropriate for any Minister to go further than that or for the House to debate it. However, I fully understand the importance to our constituents of convenience stores as well as supermarkets, as my hon. Friend reminds us.

Mr. Keith Simpson (Mid-Norfolk): My right hon. Friend the Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth) raised with the Leader of the House the press conference yesterday in which the Chief of the Defence Staff effectively contradicted the Secretary of State for Defence about the readiness of the armed forces. This is not a light matter. In the past there have been disagreements between senior military officers and the Government in power and sometimes those have leaked out, but this matter is of fundamental constitutional importance. I should like to know whether the Leader of the House has had any indication that the Secretary of State for Defence will come to the House and say that he is wrong, in which case I suppose that he would have to resign, or that he has no confidence in the Chief of the Defence Staff, in which case he would have to resign.

Mr. Cook: I am surprised that the hon. Gentleman is not working for one of the tabloids because he has

managed to over-polarise and over-sensationalise yesterday's exchange. [HON. MEMBERS: "No."] Of course he has. The Chief of the Defence Staff has certainly not expressed any lack of confidence in the Secretary of State, nor argued with him. It is a statement of the blindingly obvious—which the press always find particularly sensational—that if 19,000 troops are engaged in firefighting duties, they are not available for other purposes. Nobody would seek to deny that. I very much hope that we are successful in averting a firefighters' dispute so that those 19,000 troops are free for their military duties. However, I have not heard any reluctance from anybody in the military on the part of those 19,000 troops and their officers to undertake what they are tasked with by the Government in making sure that they provide for public safety. I am sure that many will willingly do it, perhaps with rather greater commitment than the hon. Gentleman has shown.

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle): May we have an early statement on the unfolding environmental catastrophe off the coast of Galicia in Spain? Is my right hon. Friend aware that since 1997 more than 80 oil tankers have gone to the bottom, polluting the seas, and that single-hull tankers such as the Prestige will not be banned until 2015? Given that the UK is a leading maritime nation, why can we not join President Chirac in calling for an immediate ban on single-hull tankers?

Mr. Cook: I would not wish to misrepresent the position of President Chirac, but I was Foreign Secretary at the time—I am prompted on this by my hon. Friend the Member for Streatham (Keith Hill), who was the shipping Minister at the time—and in fact President Chirac agreed to the joint effort of the UK and the Netherlands in achieving agreement within the International Maritime Organisation. If I may put the record right, we will not have to wait until 2015 to ban ships such as the Prestige —they will be banned from 2007 under the agreement that was taken with the IMO and reflected in European Union directives.

Having said that, I fully share my hon. Friend's sense of gravity about the environmental disaster that has occurred to a coastline that I know well, which is renowned for its fishing industry and the excellence of its fish diet. This is a grave tragedy, and I hope that the investigation will provide clear pointers as to who is responsible for the disaster.

Mr. Roy Beggs (East Antrim): Is the Leader of the House yet in a position to tell us when he will publish new legislation on policing for Northern Ireland? Given the recent suspension of the Northern Ireland Assembly following the discovery of a republican spy ring at Stormont, does he agree that such a Bill should not include further concessions to Sinn Fein-IRA as that would further damage the morale of the police in Northern Ireland, which is already at an all-time low?

Mr. Cook: I am not able to respond at present to the hon. Gentleman's question as to when such a Bill might be published, but I take note of what he says and I fully understand that whenever such a measure is brought before the House the debate will inevitably be coloured by recent events in Northern Ireland.

Jane Griffiths (Reading, East): My right hon. Friend will know that since 1997 the Government have given unrivalled support to public transport and that subsidy for bus services, especially in rural areas, is available as never before. However, does he know that in urban constituencies such as mine there is high car use and traffic congestion, and that no bus service is available to the people of Caversham in my constituency in the evenings or on Sundays? Will he find time for a debate on this issue, which is urgent for all of us, especially in the south-east of England?

Mr. Cook: My hon. Friend is correct to point out that substantial additional resources are going into public transport in the rural areas—from memory, I think that the extra amount of such support is more than £200 million. The system is working extremely well but we are not, of course, the bus operator. In many places, as a result of the actions of the previous Administration, companies are overwhelmingly in private hands. I fully understand my hon. Friend's concern about the impact on her constituents and I assure her that we shall continue to do all that we can to ensure that the quality of life in rural areas is maintained.

Sir Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield): I believe that it is the objective of the Leader of the House that the activities of Parliament, especially the House of Commons, should be more relevant and transparent to those whom we represent. Bearing in mind the fact that the right hon. Gentleman has announced debates for the next fortnight on referendums, which affect local government, on the future of Europe and on Iraq, does he not believe that the House should spend more time debating rather than legislating? Would it be possible for two days to be allocated for some of the bigger and more important debates, as has been historically the case, so that more Members can express their view and the Government can be made aware of the views of the people we represent about the critical issues that will be before the House?

Mr. Cook: I take the hon. Gentleman's point: we have to get the right balance between legislation and debates, between scrutiny and issues of general concern to our constituents. At this stage of the Session it is important for the House that the scrutiny of legislation announced in the Queen's Speech is under way. Indeed, it is in the interests of every Member that adequate time is available for the scrutiny of Bills, which is why it is important to get the process started. From now until Christmas there will be a high proportion of Second Reading debates, but the more of them we can get out of the way at an early date, the more room there will be for general debates after Christmas.

Mr. Iain Luke (Dundee, East): Is the Leader of the House aware of an early-day motion that I tabled late in the previous Session, commemorating the election, 80 years ago last Friday, of the only prohibitionist Member to serve in the House, Mr. Edwin Scrymgeour? Given the proposals in the Queen's Speech to extend

[Mr. Iain Luke]

licensing hours in England, will my right hon. Friend agree to hold a debate on the financial and social costs for the UK taxpayer of alcohol abuse?

Sir Nicholas Winterton: After Christmas.

Mr. Cook: Possibly it would be timely for Christmas.

The fact that only one prohibitionist has been elected to the House in 80 years may say something about the general views of our constituents, to whom I think the new licensing laws will be broadly welcome. However, there are other social factors to which my hon. Friend referred and we must vigorously continue to tackle them, as we are doing through the provisions of the national health service. The House will have an opportunity to debate the issues when the Bill is introduced, which will, I anticipate, be in good time.

Mr. Michael Jack (Fylde): Within the past two hours, some further sad and worrying news has come from Spain—the crash of a pre-production prototype of the Eurofighter. Thankfully, the crew baled out without loss of life and I understand that there were no civilian casualties. However, as the Leader of the House will appreciate, there will be uncertainties and important questions for the tens of thousands of aerospace workers in the north-west of England whose jobs are dependent on the future success of the project. Will he ensure that the Secretary of State for Defence makes a statement on the matter at the earliest opportunity?

Mr. Cook: Eurofighter is an immense project, which is of great importance to the British aviation industry, as well as for Europe's defence strategy. I very much hope that any necessary questions will be pursued to find out what may have gone wrong on this occasion. One incident, however serious and life threatening, does not itself call the project into question, so I counsel the right hon. Gentleman not to demand answers more quickly than it is possible for any sensible investigation to find them.

Mr. Martin Salter (Reading, West): I too should like to ask the Leader of the House about the vexed question of top-up fees in universities, not in the context of Cabinet collective responsibility but in relation to when Parliament will have an opportunity to express a view on the matter, rather than being sidelined while we take part in what appears at the moment to be something of a spectator sport. Bearing in mind the fact that more than 100 hon. Members have now signed early-day motion 2, is it not high time that a debate was granted on top-up fees for universities so that the views of our constituents can be properly aired?

[That this House notes with concern that a number of elite universities are making contingency plans for top up fees, which would create a two tier university system; and urges the Government to adhere to its policy of ruling out such extra charges in this and successive future parliaments.]

Mr. Cook: As I have already told the House, the Government will publish a review in the new year. From the exchanges today and other occasions, I am certainly well aware of the enormous interest in the matter in the House and the wish that the House will undoubtedly have to debate it, but it seems more appropriate that the House should debate the issue when it has before it a review and a statement of options, rather than in the abstract and in the absence of such a focus for debate. The review will not propose hard-cut single options; it will provide a variety of options, and it will be for the House to express its view on them and it will be fully involved.

Patrick Mercer (Newark): I am grateful to the Leader of the House for his comments about holding a debate on Iraq next Monday. Clearly, that is a deeply important subject, but the public conflict between the Chief of the Defence Staff and the Secretary of State for Defence is equally important and deserves not to be subsumed in another debate. Will the Leader of the House confirm whether the Secretary of State for Defence will come to the House to explain the anomalies of view between those two individuals?

Mr. Cook: Of course the Secretary of State for Defence will be here on Monday. The debate will most certainly involve those who handle our affairs, and it will be perfectly plain that we will want to ensure that there is full preparation if the military are required in Iraq, but I would advise the House that we require a certain maturity. There is no suggestion in anything said by the Chief of the Defence Staff that he is opposed to any involvement in Iraq if that is required, no suggestion that the services are not ready for that and no suggestion that they are not willing to undertake the duties that are required to stand in for the firemen if the latter go into dispute. The obvious solution to all those problems is that we avert the dispute, but if we cannot do so I do not believe that the Chief of the Defence Staff is seriously saying that he cannot undertake the necessary duties.

Mr. Chris Bryant (Rhondda): Unscrupulous commercial landlords can buy houses in my constituency for about £8,000, put tenants in them without making those houses decently habitable and then not concern themselves at all about the antisocial behaviour of those tenants. My constituents hope that that major issue will be dealt with in the draft housing Bill, which was proposed in the Queen's Speech. I wonder whether the Leader of the House can give us an idea of when that Bill might be published and when we might therefore be able to start its pre-legislative scrutiny.

Mr. Cook: I fully understand my hon. Friend's concern. The issue that he raises is a repeated concern in many of my hon. Friends' constituencies. Of course what makes it particularly serious is that communities that are already on a knife-edge as to whether they can survive are often destabilised by the actions of such unscrupulous landlords. That is why we propose to provide local authorities with the necessary powers in the forthcoming housing Bill. I anticipate that my hon. Friend will have sight of that draft some time in the new year and with good time for pre-legislative scrutiny to take place in this Session.

Dr. Evan Harris (Oxford, West and Abingdon): We look forward to the Second Reading of the local

government Bill in due course, but I would be grateful to the Leader of the House if he clarified whether it is the Government's policy to repeal section 28 of the Local Government Act 1988, as I was unable to get a clear answer on that yesterday. Will he also clarify why the Government have asked Back Benchers to propose such amendments usually on Report, rather than putting the provision in the Bill itself so that it can be debated fully in Committee?

Mr. Cook: I recall that the Labour party has a manifesto commitment on section 28, but on the proceedings in relation to the Bill, it is perfectly valid to table amendments on Report. Indeed, that is a good way for the full temper and view of the House to be heard in a way that cannot be done in Committee, which necessarily consist of only 16 hon. Members. I would robustly resist any suggestion that an amendment tabled on Report is in any way a lesser amendment, and in view of the debates that may take place in the other place, I would suggest that it is not in the hon. Gentleman's interest to press that view either.

Mr. Tom Harris (Glasgow, Cathcart): Can my right hon. Friend tell the House when it will have an opportunity to debate the Government's proposed tax on plastic carrier bags, the environmental benefits of which are not as clear-cut as some of its supporters might assume? I ask that because a company called Simpac in my constituency may have to consider laying off up to 40 people if the tax is introduced in its current form. I will have an opportunity to debate the matter next week in Westminster Hall, but all Members would welcome knowing when we will have an opportunity to consider the proposed legislation.

Mr. Cook: Any such legislation is a long way away. All we are considering at present is what may be in a performance and innovation unit report that will come out next week. I have read reports in the press that I suspect may be slightly coloured versions of what may be in that review. I invite my hon. Friend to study it with care when it comes out next week, and to vigorously express any view that he feels is appropriate before any legislation is on the horizon.

Mr. Peter Duncan (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale): The Leader of the House will surely recall that the Scottish electorate, prior to their referendum for new strata of government, were promised that the cost of their Parliament would not exceed £40 million. With that price now escalating towards £400 million, and with the prospect of the Scottish Parliament having to meet in a public house from September next year, what opportunities will there be for us to make clear to the English regions the poor experience in Scotland of regional government, and to do what we can to explore the issue with every possible means?

Mr. Cook: It is for the English regions to consider those factors that they think are relevant when they come to judge whether they wish to vote in a referendum for a regional assembly for themselves. They will no doubt consider many factors, including some of the extremely popular, distinctive polices that have been pursued by the Scottish Executive, and the fact that we have been successful in passing 10 times as many Scottish Acts in the Scottish Parliament as we ever would have passed at Westminster. The hon. Gentleman should be honest with the Chamber and with his constituents, too. If he is really proposing that his party would abolish the Scottish Parliament and end devolution, he should say so. If he is not saying that, he should stop carping from the sidelines.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East): I wonder whether you noticed, Mr. Deputy Speaker, how untypical it was of the Leader of the House to fail to look in the eye my hon. Friend the Member for Mid-Norfolk (Mr. Simpson) or my hon. Friend the Member for Newark (Patrick Mercer) when they raised their points about the Secretary of State for Defence and the Chief of the Defence Staff's extreme concern about the state of the armed forces under this Government. May we have a statement from the Secretary of State for Defence about whether he still has confidence—as he should have—in the Chief of the Defence Staff, even though the Chief of the Defence Staff evidently has no confidence in him?

Mr. Cook: This story is now spiralling out into the stratosphere. At no point did the Chief of the Defence Staff say that he had no confidence in the Secretary of State for Defence. If I may say so, the hon. Gentleman has no right to misrepresent the Chief of the Defence Staff, whose words should be treated with greater respect than he is showing for them. Nor did the Chief of the Defence Staff say anything about this Administration's neglect of the armed forces, probably because, as he also served under the previous Conservative Government, he is aware that this Government is the first for 20 years to start to increase defence spending, unlike the massive cuts that he witnessed under the Conservative Administration.

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby): May I take the Leader of the House back to the point made by the hon. Member for North-West Leicestershire (David Taylor), my Leicestershire neighbour, about the questionnaire in the consultation on the future development of air transport in the midlands? May we have a statement specifically on the questionnaire from the Secretary of State for Transport? Not only have my constituents found that they have had to wait months to get a copy of the questionnaire, but it is so hopelessly flawed that it includes the following question:

> "Would you like a greater number of flights from the Midlands to London, or is the current number adequate?"

There are no flights from the midlands to London.

The questionnaire has cost the taxpayer a great deal of money. On the basis of this questionnaire, there is a proposal to ruin all the ground between Coventry and Rugby. Will the Leader of the House arrange for a statement on this questionnaire?

Mr. Cook: I am aware that there have been a number of complaints about the consultation process, and they will obviously have to be taken into account by those assimilating the response to it. However, I suggest to the hon. Gentleman that there are more airports in the midlands than East Midlands airport. I am not entirely sure that they necessarily agree with him.

Pete Wishart (North Tayside): What assurance can the Leader of the House give us that Monday's debate on Iraq will give us the opportunity to consider a proposition that would compel the Government to seek a United Nations mandate before any military is taken in Iraq? Given that so little separates those on the Government and Opposition Front Benches on this issue, we are unlikely to have an amendment from them. Will he therefore use his considerable influence to ensure that we can consider such a proposition, that it is properly debated and that, if necessary, we can divide the House on the future role of the UN?

Mr. Cook: I remind the hon. Gentleman of what the motion for next Monday says. The final part states that, if Iraq fails to comply fully,

"the Security Council should meet to consider the situation and the need for full compliance."

I cannot imagine any responsible Member of the House who is committed to the UN as the authority for peace and security in the world objecting in any way to any part of that phrase.

Mr. Mark Francois (Rayleigh): On Monday, the House will debate the very serious prospect of going to war with Iraq. However, yesterday, there was an official Ministry of Defence press conference at which the Secretary of State for Defence and the Chief of the Defence Staff were publicly at variance about the degree of strain placed on the armed forces by having both to prepare for that conflict and to cover for the firemen's strike. Who does the Leader of the House believe is right—the Secretary of State for Defence or the principal military adviser to the Cabinet?

Mr. Cook: I have to say that there is nothing original left to say on the topic, and I do not think that the hon. Gentleman has found it. Let me put a question to Conservative Members. If they are really saying that they believe that the conclusion of the Chief of the Defence Staff is that he cannot sustain a military action in Iraq and also handle the fire dispute if that disputes proceeds—is that what they are claiming he said?—will they tell the House which of the two they would jettison and not carry out?

Dr. Julian Lewis: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it in order for the Leader of the House to ask Opposition Members to respond to a question when they have no opportunity to do so under the procedures of the House? It is clear that the response that we would be able to give is perfectly capable of coping with his question, because we would point out that the extreme concern expressed by the Chief of the Defence Staff is about a matter of overstretch, which the Government have consistently and wrongly denied is taking place.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): That matter has probably been aired sufficiently. No doubt it can be aired again if that is the wish of hon. Members.

BILLS PRESENTED

European Parliament (Representation)

Yvette Cooper, supported by the Prime Minister, Mr. Secretary Prescott, Mr. Secretary Straw, Mr. Secretary Murphy, Secretary Helen Liddell and Secretary Peter Hain, presented a Bill to make provision enabling alterations to be made to the total number of Members of the European Parliament to be elected for the United Kingdom and to their distribution between the electoral regions; to make provision for and in connection with the establishment of an electoral region including Gibraltar for the purposes of European Parliamentary elections; and for connected purposes. And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Monday next, and to be printed. Explanatory notes to be printed [Bill 7].

Criminal Justice

Mr. Secretary Blunkett, supported by the Prime Minister, Mr. Secretary Prescott, Mr. Secretary Milburn, Mr. Secretary Murphy, Secretary Helen Liddell, Secretary Peter Hain, Hilary Benn and Yvette Cooper, presented a Bill to make provision about criminal justice (including the powers and duties of the police) and about dealing with offenders; to amend the law relating to jury service; to amend Chapter 1 of Part 1 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998; and for connected purposes. And the same was read the First time; and ordered to be read a Second time on Monday next, and to be printed. Explanatory notes to be printed [Bill 8].

Common Fisheries Policy

[Relevant document: European Union document No. 12137/02, Commission Communication, a strategy for the sustainable development of European aquaculture.]

1.18 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mr. Elliot Morley): I beg to move,

That this House takes note of European Union documents No. COM (02) 181, Commission Communication on the reform of the Common Fisheries Policy ("Roadmap"), No. COM (02) 185, draft Council Regulation on the conservation and sustainable exploitation of fisheries resources under the Common Fisheries Policy, No. COM (02) 187, draft Council Regulation amending Regulation (EC) No. 2792/1999 laying down the detailed rules and arrangements regarding Community structural assistance in the fisheries sector, No. COM (02) 190, draft Council Regulation establishing an emergency Community measure for scrapping fishing vessels, No. COM (02) 186, Commission Communication, a Community Action Plan to integrate environmental protection requirements into the Common Fisheries Policy, and No. COM (02) 180, Commission Communication, a Community Action Plan for the eradication of illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing; and supports the Government's objectives, which are to work for a Common Fisheries Policy that is environmentally and economically sustainable, to strengthen the Common Fisheries Policy's regional dimension, to increase industry involvement in decisions on fisheries management and conservation and improve the dialogue between fishermen and scientists, to increase the integration of environmental concerns into fisheries management, to introduce clearer procedures for responding quickly to conservation emergencies, to confirm the 6 and 12-mile access restrictions on a permanent basis, to continue relative stability (including the Hague Preference) and retain the Shetland Box, to ensure greater effectiveness and consistency in control and enforcement of European Union requirements, while attempting to simplify the burden of control on fishermen, to improve the value for money of third country agreements and their coherence with development and environmental objectives and to promote the effective operation of Regional Fisheries Organizations.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): I must inform the House that Mr. Speaker has selected the amendment in the name of the leader of the Liberal Democrat party.

Mr. Morley: I am pleased that the House has an opportunity to debate the take-note motion on the European documents, particularly in the light of the circumstances of which we are all aware. I refer to the Commission proposals and to the very bad recommendations from the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea in relation to the state of North sea stocks and cod, in particular.

The debate was originally scheduled to give Members an opportunity to discuss the proposals for the reform of the common fisheries policy. That was important in that it would have allowed them to contribute their views. However, we cannot ignore the severe scientific advice on the state of stocks, and nothing could underline more clearly the need for the Council of Ministers to take brave and radical decisions on the future shape of the CFP. We are debating the issue at the right time, because the time for decision is the December meeting of the Council of Ministers. It will not be an easy meeting—they never are—because the December Council will have to consider the annual quotas, the recovery plan and the finalisation of the CFP review.

Sir Robert Smith (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine): It is more urgent than the Minister suggests. Negotiations with Norway are taking place now and the results will set the framework for the meeting of Ministers. So it is crucial that we are aware of the arguments about the latest scientific information and the more subtle messages that come from it.

Mr. Morley: The hon. Gentleman is right. Although we can make progress on some stocks in the agreement between the European Union and Norway, as we will on pelagic stocks and saithe, the outcome of discussions on the North sea and the cod recovery programme will greatly influence decisions on other stocks.

David Burnside (South Antrim): Can the Minister be more specific when he refers to the North sea? Does he mean just the North sea or all the seas around the British isles, including the Irish sea? He is well aware that conservation in the Irish sea is more advanced in respect of moratoriums during the spawning period. We hope that we can defend the North sea and the Irish sea, but can he be more precise?

Mr. Morley: I assure the hon. Gentleman that in my methodical way I am working my way around the seas around the coast. I have no intention of underestimating the possible impact on the Irish sea, the west coast of Scotland or the western approaches. I am the United Kingdom Minister and it is my responsibility to pay heed to the whole of the country and every region in it, which I intend to do. I will specifically address the Irish sea. I understand that particular issues are a priority for fishing industries in particular regions. I work closely with the devolved Administrations and listen carefully to their views so that I ensure that the concerns of their fishing industries are taken into account.

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): I am glad that the Minister mentioned the science. The report by the Advisory Committee on Fishery Management shows that the haddock spawning stock biomass is the largest it has been since 1971; the saithe spawning stock biomass is the largest it has been since 1976; and the whiting spawning stock biomass is the largest it has been since 1991. Prawn stocks are also robust. Even the spawning stock biomass for cod, which is low, has increased 27 per cent. since last year. Given that, where did the recommendations for a total closure or draconian cuts come from, because they are in no way supported by the underlying scientific figures?

Mr. Morley: With respect, we need to interpret the science carefully, including those figures. Although some of them are encouraging, the underlying trends are not good for any stock, including haddock and whiting. It is true that there is a good year class in haddock. One of my objectives is to ensure that we manage that successfully so that we have a sustainable haddock fishery. I wish I could show the House a chart on the

[Mr. Morley]

spawning biomass of cod. Although we can argue about the details of fishery science, which is not a precise art, there is no question about the trends, and the trend for North sea cod is demonstrated by a line that plummets below its safe spawning biomass.

The situation is serious. Hon. Members, including the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond), have written to me about it and I propose to invite MPs, especially those from the North sea fishing ports, to attend a meeting to talk about the science in more detail. As the hon. Gentleman has raised the matter, I will try to ensure that one of our scientists attends the meeting to discuss those figures, their interpretation and exactly what they mean.

Andrew George (St. Ives): No one questions the seriousness of the problem, but does the Minister accept that the science is largely based on estimates made earlier this year? It does not take proper account of the effect of the technical and other measures in place, some of which have been taken unilaterally by the industry. Those measures might lead to a significant perceptible improvement in the spawning stock biomass for cod in the North sea later this year.

Mr. Morley: Much has been done in this country. We have not been sitting around doing nothing when we have been considering the science. We identified that cod in particular was in some difficulties. That is why, since 2000, we have embarked on a number of recovery programmes, particularly in the Irish sea. The industry is to be congratulated on its involvement in the success of those programmes. We have a long way to go, however, in achieving recovery from a low base.

The hon. Gentleman is right about what we have done, and those actions must be taken into account—I shall say more about that in a moment.

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): I thank my hon. Friend for giving way—he has been characteristically generous in doing so. He is aware that the Select Committee on Environment, Food and Rural Affairs is looking into fishing at the moment. We have just come back from Brussels, where we received a gloomy message on stocks. Does my hon. Friend agree that we need an urgent scientific investigation into discard? We should look at the amount being thrown back, as that is completely unacceptable, not only in the operation of a modern industry, but in economic terms—we are almost paying people to cheat or not care about conservation. If my hon. Friend could initiate such an investigation, his epitaph would record that he had sorted the problem out.

Mr. Morley: I am always looking for a good epitaph. My hon. Friend is right—discard is a bane of fisheries management. We hear a lot about marketable fisheries thrown over the side of a boat because the quota has been exceeded. We do not hear very much, however, about high grading or undersized and unmarketable fish which are thrown over the side in large quantities in fisheries in all European Union states. We need to tackle that. Incidentally, one of the proposals concerns effort management on kilowatt days, which I know is controversial in the fishing industry. However, I talk to it a lot about discards, and always make it clear that I am prepared to look at alternative management approaches to reducing them. The annual quota is one method, and has some benefits. However, the only alternative to a quota system that promotes discarding is a form of effort management along the lines of kilowatt days.

There are mixed views in the industry about that approach, which does not invite universal opposition—there are people who support it. At this stage, where we are negotiating with the Commission, looking at options and talking to the industry, I do not rule any approach out or in.

Mr. Salmond: The Minister said that we need to tackle discards. Surely, the scientific research from the research voyages conducted for Scottish fishermen and the Scottish Executive shows that we have tackled discards? The summary of the findings shows that there is a 70 per cent. escape of marketable whiting and a 50 per cent. escape of marketable haddock. When the fishermen went to Brussels on Monday, the Commission said that it had not even considered the scientific evidence for fishing with big mesh and square mesh panels. When will it do so, and when will that be introduced?

Mr. Morley: The hon. Gentleman's comment is true. I am not aware of any evidence in the figures or proposals that takes into account what we have done in this country. I repeat: we have not been sitting back waiting for the situation to get out of hand. There has been a reduction in effort in the UK fleet, and I will ensure that that is taken into account.

Mr. John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings) *rose—*

Mr. Morley: It is only courteous to give way to the hon. Gentleman, but may I first point out that this is a standard European debate? When I discussed the procedure for this debate, my office assured me that it would not be an hour of intensive questions, as it normally is. I do not duck that approach, but I want to develop my argument and give other hon. Members a chance to contribute.

Mr. Hayes: In that helpful spirit, I shall limit my interventions to one, as I shall have a chance to challenge the Minister's assertions later. He talked about discards and the industry's efforts. The hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) was right that those efforts have been considerable, but that is not universally so. I draw to the Minister's attention a producer in the south-west who was told by his French counterpart, "Of course we stick to the rules. We only sell officially those fish that can be sold within the rules—the others are sold unofficially." Fish that should have been discarded were being marketed. That is happening widely in other countries, even though their industry is playing it by the book.

Mr. Morley: This year we prosecuted 200 people in the UK who held similar views to the French, so let us not think that everything is perfect in our own country. I shall say a few words about that in a moment.

Let me focus on reform of the common fisheries policy. There is a link between CFP reform, recovery plans and quotas. We must discuss a number of aspects of the hake and cod recovery plan, which will be dealt with in the December Council. The background to all these issues, which we cannot ignore, is that fishing mortality is too high and is unsustainable. Stocks are diminishing, and although the instruments used under the CFP so far, such as total allowable catches and technical measures, have had some effect, they have failed to produce the reduction in fishing effort on depleted stocks that is fundamentally required. There are various reasons for that, not all to do with the CFP.

Mr. A. J. Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed): When the Minister speaks of fish mortality, he must surely recognise that fish caught for human consumption are but a tiny portion of fish mortality. Compared with the effects of Danish industrial fishing, what power stations do to fisheries stocks, what seals take and what seabirds take, the amount fished for human consumption is very small. The Minister must ensure that we concentrate our efforts on producing a satisfactory basis for that.

Mr. Morley: Yes, but we must see the problem in perspective. There is natural mortality within the fish stock, and the biggest predator on fish is other fish. There are other impacts, which I do not discount, but we cannot get away from the fact that there is a natural cycle of mortality and that fishing at an unsustainable level is not natural and will lead to a terminal downward spiral of the stocks. We cannot allow that to happen.

Miss Anne Begg (Aberdeen, South): I know that my hon. Friend appreciates that one of the problems of the CFP is that when stocks become unsustainable the suggestion is that one of the fisheries should be closed—in this case, the cod fishery. The processors in my constituency are afraid that if the cod fishing grounds are closed they will not have access to the haddock and whiting. They are terrified—that is genuine, and it happens every three years—that their whole business will be wiped out, because the skills will be lost if those fisheries are closed even for a year. People will go off to other jobs. It happened with the herring a couple of decades ago, and people are anxious that it should not happen this time. For them, the closing of the cod fishery would be the worst decision.

Mr. Morley: I understand my hon. Friend's point. She and colleagues from Aberdeen have arranged meetings with me about their processors. I understand their concerns and their vulnerability. That is an example of the balance that we must achieve in our approach to the problem. I recognise that onshore jobs will be affected by what happens to jobs at sea. I assure my hon. Friend that that is always at the back of my mind.

On the package of measures relating to the CFP, we strongly support many of the suggestions. There are measures covering the scrapping of vessels, and deals for the granting of subsidies. The Commission's CFP reform package also includes an action plan, which we endorse, to combat illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing, a communication on integration of environmental protection requirements into the CFP, which we support, and action plans on aquaculture and on the management of fisheries in the Mediterranean, which are based on very sensible ideas. The UK welcomes the fact that care for the environment and the adoption of the precautionary approach to stock management are watchwords of the Commission's whole CFP package.

On the basic package before us, one of the key elements that we strongly support is the abolition across the EU of subsidies for the construction and modernisation of fishing vessels. Given the problems that we face with regard to fish stocks, it makes no sense to subsidise the building of more efficient fishing vessels. We will strongly support the Commission on that. We also support a commitment to put in place recovery plans for fish stocks shown by science to be outside safe biological limits, as well as multi-annual management plans for other stocks. We think that that is the right way forward.

We support a commitment to establishing effort controls among the management options available in both recovery plans and multi-annual management plans. It is now difficult to believe that the sort of adjustments needed in fishing efforts can be achieved without some element of direct control. We will have to explore that issue.

We support the retention of relative stability. Indeed, that is one of our key negotiating positions. The retention of relative stability is absolutely essential as part of the reform of the common fisheries policy. It provides the basis for dividing fishing opportunities among member states, which is important if we are to avoid the development of extra pressure on already depleted stocks such as those in the North sea. Related to that issue is the question of Hague preference, which the Commission says will be taken into account in the future allocation of quotas. Again, we strongly welcome that. For us, it must simply mean that Hague preference is retained so that UK fishermen continue to benefit at times when quotas are low, with a recognition of the special circumstances of our fishing communities and the history of fishing in the UK and of our relationship with the European Union.

We also support retention of the current restrictions on access to member states' 12-mile limits, which the Commission proposed should be given a permanent basis. We will certainly support that proposal. We support renewal of the Shetland box, which we believe is justified on socio-economic and conservation grounds, and a stronger role for the Commission in monitoring member states' enforcement of the rules and promoting co-operation among member states on enforcement—another matter that has been raised in interventions.

One of our key objectives is putting in place regional advisory councils, drawing together for the first time all stakeholders in fisheries that are of interest to more than one member state. Our idea is that the councils would develop management measures and recommend them to the Commission and Council of Ministers for adoption. We believe that that innovation is vital if we are to improve the effectiveness of management measures. Fishermen in particular need to know that their views count—we need to assure them of that—and to have confidence in the measures that are adopted and some input into decisions about them.

[Mr. Morley]

We need in many cases to seek to shape those key features of the Commission's proposals to take account of the United Kingdom's various concerns and interests.

Mr. Peter Duncan (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale):I accept what the Minister says about improving the industry's confidence in the procedures. Does he accept that he and his colleagues throughout the EU would go a long way towards increasing confidence in the industry if they allowed fishermen access to the negotiations?

Mr. Morley: I do not think that the hon. Gentleman is suggesting that I should be accompanied in the Council of Ministers by all the fishermen of the United Kingdom and that all the fishermen of every other member state should also be present. Frankly, there would not be a room in Europe big enough to fit them all in. We must certainly involve the fishing industry as far as possible. That is why I have a meeting with all UK industry representatives before each Council meeting. I usually give them an update of what is going on in the middle of the proceedings and I meet them all again at the end to tell them the outcome. I assure him that we take very seriously the involvement of the industry and that I ensure that it has its say and is kept informed.

Sir Robert Smith: One of the frustrations at the Norway negotiations is that Norwegian fishing industry representatives are present with their Government's representatives, but no fishing representatives are allowed in from the EU side to help back up the negotiations from that perspective.

Mr. Morley: I can tell the hon. Gentleman that our fishing industry representatives are present at the EU-Norway talks. There may be a slightly different system in relation to Norway, but I am not aware that any special treatment is given to Norwegian fishermen's organisations in comparison with ours. None the less, I shall look into the matter for him.

I was very anxious to be brief, but I am willing to take interventions. I only hope that hon. Members do not hold that against me and that it will count as injury time to be added to my speech.

On the discussions that are currently under way, hon. Members will be aware that a block of member states has styled itself "friends of fisheries", although some say that with friends like that, fisheries are in more trouble than we thought. Those in the group have rather contrasting views. What unites them is their opposition to the abolition of construction grants, but there is a great deal on which they are divided. We are not alone in the Council of Ministers in arguing the UK view.

We have allies and we respect individual member states' positions. Although we may not agree on every aspect of the CFP with every member state, we have a qualified majority on a range of objectives that are vital to our country. On other matters, including building grants, we do not have a qualified majority. We have a blocking minority, but although I have blocking minorities on a variety of subjects, that applies to other countries and other issues.

It is in no country's interest to be deadlocked at the end of the year, and I am trying to secure an agreement on the reformed CFP by then. That will require negotiation with the presidency, the Council and other member states.

Mr. Drew: We could push international inspection. The biggest problem in the industry is lack of trust. Is it not sensible to take the friends of fisheries aside and try to negotiate with them about the benefit of having up-front independent inspectors, so that we know what is being caught?

Mr. Morley: My hon. Friend is right. We are already co-operating with other member states. Spain is a good example because Spanish inspectors have visited our ports and our inspectors have been to Spanish ports. We have a good personal relationship with countries such as Spain. That country has made it clear that it does not object to the idea of a stronger role for the Commission in spot-checking and international enforcement that is applied equally to all member states. We would like that to happen, and I believe that we can develop the proposal.

As I said earlier, it is likely that we will decide on the total allowable catches and quotas for 2003 in terms of the cod and hake recovery plan at the December Council. We do not know what the Commission will propose, but the EU must respond to the severe scientific advice on cod and other stocks.

Andrew George: Will the Under-Secretary give way?

Mr. Morley: I want to make a little progress.

The advice is that we must introduce a moratorium on fishing for cod and stocks such as haddock and whiting, unless we can find ways in which to minimise by-catches and discards of cod. The implication is that the North sea will shut. Let me make it clear that I do not believe that that is a realistic option. However, we cannot simply oppose it. We must recognise that the Commissioner is responding to the science, and welcome his wish to identify alternative approaches. We should be in no doubt that such alternatives will have a serious effect on fishermen if they are to lead to any stock recovery, but there are options other than wholesale closure. That also applies to the Irish sea and the west coast of Scotland.

David Burnside: Will the Under-Secretary assure hon. Members that a moratorium is not being considered for the Irish sea because of the current state of stocks? He recently said:

"At worst the cod situation has bottomed out and at best there are signs of improvement."

Will he confirm that the Irish sea is not under consideration for a moratorium?

Mr. Morley: I have that point in my notes. A great deal of work has been done in the Irish sea. Although we must be cautious about interpreting the science, it encourages me that there has been an upturn from the almost terminal decline of the breeding biomass of cod in the Irish sea. However, the upturn is modest, and we cannot

ignore that. One upturn in one year does not mean that we have turned the corner. We cannot be complacent about the Irish sea, but we are making progress.

Mrs. Joan Humble (Blackpool, North and Fleetwood): I am pleased with my hon. Friend's statement. Will he reassure Fleetwood fishermen that the full impact of the Irish sea cod recovery programme will be taken into account? They have co-operated with the programme and worked hard within it, and they are more than happy to continue with it. They want it to be fair, and they want the full impact of the past three years to be taken into account so that there is no complete closure, and to ensure that they have a future.

Mr. Morley: I can give my hon. Friend that assurance. She arranged a meeting between the Fleetwood fishermen and me at the recent Blackpool conference. That was constructive, and I acknowledge the work that they have done in co-operating with the recovery programmes in the Irish sea. I understand their point of view, and I can assure my hon. Friend that I will take it seriously in future negotiations.

Mr. Bob Blizzard (Waveney): Does my hon. Friend recognise that long-lining is a highly environmentally sustainable method of catching fish, particularly cod, because it does not result in young dead fish being hauled up in nets, only to be thrown back? Bearing that in mind, whatever has to be done to preserve, or to try to resurrect, cod stocks in the North sea, will he seek a future for long-lining? I do not believe that long-lining is the reason that cod stocks have been so badly damaged.

Mr. Morley: My hon. Friend has arranged meetings for me with his long-liners to discuss the issue. Certain methods of fishing are highly selective and have a very low impact, and I do not think it unreasonable that people using such methods should get some special consideration or treatment. That view may not be shared by other member states, but I am certainly prepared to make a case for it.

Andrew George: The Minister's remarks are welcome, but will he comment on the uneven focus that a number of the member states are giving to other fishery methods? The result is a much-needed focus on the white fish industry, but we are only now reaching the stage of planning that an impact study of the effects of industrial fishing will take place next year. We should be much further forward in dealing with that issue, as industrial fishing has the greatest impact of all on fishing, especially in the North sea.

Mr. Morley: I do not disagree with the hon. Gentleman. Indeed, I do not disagree with many of the points that hon. Members have made, particularly on behalf of their constituencies, which can be quite severely affected by these changes. They are right to raise these issues; it is the responsible thing for constituency MPs to do, and taking their views into account is the responsible thing for me, as a UK Minister, to do.

We cannot, however, get away from the fact that we must take the scientific advice seriously. Without fish, there will not be a fishing industry. That is not to say that we should not challenge and examine the scientific advice, and I give the House an assurance that that will be done. Attacking the science is not helpful, however, and one or two politicians—not, I hope, those in the Chamber today—have made unhelpful remarks about it. They think that they are doing the industry a service by rubbishing the science and pretending that there is not a problem—but we cannot do that; we have to recognise the reality.

We must identify an approach to achieving recovery that will impact even-handedly on all the fleets in the European Union, because I have no intention of allowing the UK to take all the impact of such measures. The approach must apply to all affected fisheries, and it must maximise the possibilities for fishing to continue. My ministerial colleagues from the devolved Administrations and I, and our officials, are talking urgently to the industry to identify the options.

Mr. Salmond: The Minister has said openly that he disagrees with the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea on industrial fishing. Does he appreciate how disillusioning it is when, after many years of effort by him and other Members, myself included, a fleet moves to using a big 100mm mesh with square mesh panels, only to find that no one else is doing so—not even south of Newcastle, as the Minister is well aware—and that that huge move, in environmental and conservation terms, is not even being taken into account when the recommendations are being made? Does he understand the frustration and anger that that causes among fishermen?

Mr. Morley: Of course I understand that, but it is important for those who represent the industry not to start panicking at this stage. There is a lot to do. The work that we have done on effort calculation—some of which is quite recent; we are still calculating the effort—has not been factored into the equations, but I assure the House that it will be. I will ensure that it is.

Ann Winterton (Congleton): The Minister has played the environmental card throughout the debate, but is not there an inherent danger in that, as it masks the true agenda for integration and plays into the hands of the Commission? If agreement is not reached by the end of the year, the Commission can introduce six-month emergency measures—which can, I hasten to add, be continued under article 174 of the Maastricht treaty, which relates to the environment.

Mr. Morley: If there is no agreement in the Council, the Commission can introduce emergency measures that could include closing the North sea. For that reason, the alternative case that we make must be sensible and able to stand up to examination. I have a lot of respect and time for the hon. Lady, but I hear a hint of Eurosceptic conspiracy theory creeping in here. I believe that there is a broad-based approach in the House, across parties, to the points that I have outlined and to what we need to do. There is support for that.

Ann Winterton: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way again, because I asked a simple and

[Ann Winterton]

straightforward question. He answered the first part, about the six-month emergency powers, but will he now accept the fact that article 174 of the Maastricht treaty—

Mr. George Foulkes (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley): Which the Tories introduced.

Ann Winterton: I am sure that the right hon. Gentleman voted for it as well.

Mr. Foulkes: The Tories put it through.

Ann Winterton: Right. I shall talk about that later, but now I am asking the Minister, who is in government and in power, whether those emergency powers can be continued under that treaty on environmental grounds.

Mr. Morley: In terms of how the powers apply to fisheries, I understand that they cannot. They are time-limited and temporary. However, I do not apologise for acknowledging environmental issues; they are very important. There is no contradiction between concern for the marine environment and concern for the fishing industry, because the fishermen themselves are concerned about the marine environment. They know that if we do not have strong environmental measures, we shall have no fishing industry. I am perhaps unique among European fisheries Ministers in that I am both an Environment Minister and a fisheries Minister. I find that a strength in my approach and my negotiations, not a weakness.

The hon. Member for Congleton (Ann Winterton) brings me on to other points. On the environment, for example, I am surprised by the Liberal Democrat amendment, because it is weaker than the Government motion. We make it very clear from the beginning of our motion that we recognise the importance of the environment, but there is no such acknowledgement in the Liberal Democrat amendment. I am sure that I shall not disagree with a lot of what the Liberal Democrats say in the debate, but if they want a strong, credible green policy to defend our fishing industry, they should vote with us tonight. I make that minor point to them now.

I am sure that we shall hear about national control from the hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr. Hayes), but I hope that he can define better than his predecessors exactly what that means. We have national control. I say to him that we face an important issue and a serious situation for fishing stocks. It is important to achieve some consensus here, and ensure that the Conservative party is not dictated to or distracted by its Eurosceptic fringe. That was a real problem for the previous Government and it had far-reaching consequences—one of which, incidentally, is that my Government have been taken to the European Court for fisheries enforcement infractions dating back 11 years from 1996.

Responsibility for that court case does not lie with Conservative Ministers. I was an Opposition spokesman at that time, so I know that they were doing their best to get to grips with the enforcement problems affecting our own fleet, but the climate created for them by a Eurosceptic rump dictating to the Government made it impossible to introduce such measures. As a result, when I became Minister in 1997, black fish landings were rife in this country. I do not dispute criticism of the common fisheries policy, which is often justified, but the fishing industry must take some responsibility for infringements in the past. Not only is such action damaging; it undermines the science when scientists suspect that declarations are not accurate. That helps no one. It does not help the industry, it does not help the science and it does not help me to make decisions.

Mr. Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland): Should we not now be getting scientists on to commercial fishing boats rather than using gear that is 20 years out of date and has no credibility in the industry?

Mr. Morley: That is a common misapprehension. Research vessels use the same gear, because they are carrying out constant effort sampling. They need to use the same gear because they are measuring the same effort over a long period. I agree, however, that it is important to establish a close relationship between scientists and the industry. That is why we have invited industry leaders on to our research vessels, and why we charter commercial fishing vessels as part of our studies, with our scientists on board. In fact, I believe that some vessels from the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) were chartered recently for use in the Irish sea.

It is important not to obscure a critical fisheries management issue with Euroscepticism. I was appalled to read some comments by Conservative MEPs who said that the proposed closure of the North sea was part of a great, secret Euro-plot to divide the EU into monopolies so that France would dominate farming, Germany would dominate heavy industry and manufacturing, Belgium would become the centre for "centralised bureaucracy"—that does not sound a very good deal to me—and Spain would dominate fishing. Apparently, the whole idea of closing down the North sea is to allow in the Spanish. Those are just silly childish conspiracy theories. The fishing industry deserves better.

The fixation of the Scottish National party on who goes to the Council and who speaks there is not helpful either; I say that in the most gentle way. Colleagues from the devolved Administrations probably have more access to and involvement in fisheries policy in DEFRA than Scottish Office Ministers ever did. I speak as one who was a MAFF Minister before devolution and has been a DEFRA Minister since. I will ensure that the devolved Administrations are involved in every aspect of decision making, and that their voice, as well as that of the Scottish Office—my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland is here to show her support and commitment—is heard clearly and strongly, expressing their interests as part of a United Kingdom approach.

Mr. Salmond: Will the Minister give way?

Mr. Morley: I cannot do otherwise.

Mr. Salmond: How does the Minister explain a letter I have received from the general secretariat of the

European Fisheries Council? It states that the name of the Scottish Fisheries Minister, Ross Finnie, appeared on one list of participants, but did not appear on the list for a range of other Council meetings. Although the Minister had attended those meetings, his name did not appear. What is the status of the Scottish Fisheries Minister at such meetings? There seems to be some confusion.

Mr. Morley: There is no confusion. It is the Council's practice simply to record the name of the lead Minister of the delegation.

Under the terms of the devolution settlement, this is indisputably a reserved matter for the Westminster Parliament. I am the lead Minister from the lead Department, but the Ministers from the devolved Administrations are part of the process at every stage and at every level. They are consulted closely. They attend our ministerial meetings in the Department, they attend all our pre-Council briefings, they attend the Council with me, and they speak at the Council supporting the UK line—while, of course, defending their own regional priorities. That is the strength of our approach; it is not a weakness.

Mr. Foulkes: I urge my hon. Friend to ignore the nitpicking of the SNP—and, I must confess, of the Liberal Democrats. It is a question not of who leads the delegation, but of the fact that this would forward powerfully and effectively the voice of the United Kingdom Government and of the devolved Administration. Knowing the people involved, I can say that there is no one better or more capable of putting forward that view effectively than my hon. Friend.

Mr. Morley: I was actually trying to make a point to unite the House—*[Laughter.]* I may have gone a bit astray.

My point was that all Members participating in this debate have legitimate constituency concerns, and I take such contributions seriously—from whichever side of the House they come. I am simply saying that there has been some nonsense surrounding this issue. It is a serious one, so let us concentrate on the threats that the industry faces and address them in a responsible way.

We will carefully examine the science. I have spoken to the Executive and to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland, and I will give a commitment that we will not blindly sign up to any proposal until we have properly evaluated it, looked at its implications, and considered whether or not it is justified. I also give an undertaking that we will recognise the impact on the fishing fleet—we do not ignore that—in all parts of the country. Northern Ireland's priority in respect of nephrops is very important, and I think that we can address that, along with matters relating to the North sea and the west coast.

We will of course strongly challenge practices such as industrial fishing. The hon. Member for Banff and Buchan says that I am denying the science, but I am not. I have looked very carefully at it, and we are participating in scientific studies on industrial fishing. However, there is also a precautionary principle. When it comes to a choice between industrial fishing and fishing for human consumption, the latter must take priority on all occasions. An element of doubt guides many of the commission's proposals in terms of a precautionary approach, and the industrial fleets must be part of that approach. They cannot be exempted from it, and we will be making that point.

We will also look carefully at the proposals for the west coast and the Irish sea. At the moment, I am not happy about the idea that the Commission is simply taking some of the scientific analysis on the North sea and applying the methodology to the Irish sea. That position is not necessarily justified, and I can assure hon. Members that we will consider our approach to the issue closely. The fact is that, whatever we do, I cannot guarantee that there will be no impact on fishing ports and fishing fleets. If there is such an impact, we will of course examine what help we can give through the available structures and structural funds.

David Burnside: I find it hard to talk about "decommissioning" without thinking about the other form of it. One of the greatest threats is the permanency of the decommissioning of fishing vegetables—*[Laughter.]* I meant to say fishing vessels. Is there a form of subsidy similar to the set-aside subsidy that applies to agricultural land? There are strong feelings about that subsidy, but it does keep land in operation, and in the ownership of farms. The issue is keeping vessels in existence, and in the ownership of local fishermen and fishing families who have been involved in the industry for a long time, without permanently ending the use of such vessels.

Mr. Morley: I understand the hon. Gentleman's point, which he has made very articulately before. I realise that decommissioning is double-edged, in that it permanently takes away capacity. The advantage is that other fishing vessels become more viable, and I do not rule out a possible role for decommissioning as part of an overall package. I shall of course think about the issue, and discuss whether decommissioning is appropriate.

Provision is made under EU rules for time-limited—in other words, not very long—tie-up support. Unfortunately, the problems that we face are not short-term. I do not want to mislead the House, or to duck the issue: turning some of these stocks round will take a number of years. I understand the hon. Gentleman's point, but decommissioning is one of a number of options, although I stress that it is not the only one. I understand the long-term impact that it has on fishing ports, and that will influence the decisions that I take.

In conclusion, I can promise that we will examine the science carefully. We have done that already in connection with the North sea nephrops fishery, on which I see no justification for restrictions. The Government are clear that that fishery is very important to both Scotland and England.

We will expect any recovery measure to apply to all nations with access to a particular fishery. We will not accept severe restrictions if other nations do not take their share of the responsibility. We will continue to engage with the industry and with colleagues in the devolved Administrations to find the best way forward. We will vigorously defend our national interest with all

[Mr. Morley]

the facilities at our disposal, and we will adopt a partnership approach with colleagues in the Scottish Executive, the Scottish Office, Northern Ireland and Wales.

We are committed to the sustainable management of our seas. We will act responsibly in respect of the science, but we will also defend our industry's interests robustly. It has a proud record, plays an important role and serves vital regional interests.

2.6 pm

Mr. John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings): At the outset, let me assure the House that I have no doubt about the Minister's integrity or knowledge of the subject. He has done this job for a long time, and taken part in many debates in the House. His breadth of knowledge and understanding are remarkable. However, the British fishing industry feels betrayed—by the EU, the common fisheries policy and, most dishonourably of all, by those in this Parliament who have persistently advocated and pursued a policy that has resulted in the dramatic decline of our once-proud fishing fleet and in the consequent damage to communities where fishing is central to the culture and the economy.

I refer to those communities' culture because fishing is not just a job. It is a way of life, and is usually rooted in families that have been involved in the industry for generations. It is not something that people can lightly give up to pursue another career.

Many families and communities now face the betrayal that may be the final chapter in this tragic tale. The industry has declined dramatically. For example, the east coast of England once boasted many important fishing ports, but now it is almost bare of this great industry. Yesterday, I met fishermen from the east coast who struggle to continue with their way of life. Their confidence has been eroded and their hopes dashed. We should not be surprised at their solemnity, given the tiny numbers of boats that now set to sea from those once-proud ports. My hon. Friend the Member for Boston and Skegness (Mr. Simmonds), such a champion of the Boston fishermen, tells me that about 20 boats now work out of that port. About 10 boats work from Grimsby, and the same number from Whitby. Scarborough has about four working boats, and Bridlington and Hartlepool a couple each. The Minister must concede that those numbers are as shameful as they are pitiful. However, those ports are in a better state than Lowestoft. Who could have believed a decade—let alone 20 years—ago that Lowestoft would have no fishing industry?

Mr. Blizzard: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hayes: Perhaps the hon. Gentleman will say that the industry has revived in Lowestoft. I should be delighted if that were the case.

Mr. Blizzard: When Opposition Members get put on their Front Bench, they do not think that they will be there long, so they make rash statements. Lowestoft has an inshore fleet comprising 18 vessels, and there are nine beam trawlers that stop fishing in the summer. The town also retains its fish market. If the hon. Gentleman thinks that he can talk down Lowestoft fish market and finish it off, he will have the fish merchants down on him.

Mr. Hayes: That is a pretty low intervention, from an hon. Gentleman for whom I have a great deal of respect—although he is not as big as he once was, as we were discussing just the other day. He knows what I meant when I said that the industry had declined dramatically in Lowestoft to the point of extinction. Of course there is an inshore fleet and a fish market in Lowestoft. There is still a thriving fish industry in Grimsby as well, but most of the product that it uses is imported. It is not caught in or anywhere near Grimsby. That is what shocks people. I acknowledge that Lowestoft is not dead in that respect, but the hon. Gentleman, who is a decent and honourable representative of that part of the world, will be as sad as I am that the fishing that it once enjoyed and for which it was famed came to an end just a few months ago.

The Minister tells us that the British fleet in England and Scotland is still unsustainable, despite the reductions. He did not give a very good answer to the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith), who said that the decline in fish stocks is at least as much to do with the other threats to fish such as toxins and industrial fishing as with fishing for human consumption. The change in climate, for example, has driven cod further north into the North sea. The Minister was aware of those arguments but dismissed the intervention that pointed out the facts. The Minister has come to the view that the British fishing industry, even in its current form, is, in his words, unsustainable.

The decline in the fishing industry has cut by a third the number of boats that go out from British ports, but the amount of fish caught has fallen by only about 10 per cent. The Minister will say that that is the whole problem. However, he does not acknowledge that the reason for that equation is that our fish stocks continue to be fished by many other nations using methods that we regard as unacceptable. I will talk later in more detail about industrial fishing. The hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) made a telling intervention about it today, as he did a few days ago. We have yet to have a satisfactory answer. I do not say that the Minister does not have a noble record on this. I have had much pleasure over the last few weeks reading his speeches over many years—they are most entertaining and have been my bedtime reading. He has always been against industrial fishing but his assurances today will come as cold comfort to an industry that sees it perpetuated, particularly by Denmark and Norway.

Mr. Morley: I am proud to have negotiated with Denmark, in a very friendly way, a three-year closure off Scotland on Wee Bankie. It comes to an end this year. I welcome the opportunity to assure the House that it is my intention to continue that closed area because I think that our justification for the original closure still stands.

Mr. Hayes: I am grateful for that assurance but the Minister knows that industrial fishing does not occur only off the coast of Scotland. He would not want to deceive the House in any way, shape or form and he will

acknowledge that industrial fishing is a massive problem in waters around the United Kingdom, particularly the North sea, and that the effect has been devastating.

This further plague of reductions is on a baseline already so eroded that, in many cases, it will be the end of the deep-sea fishing industry from ports up and down the country. This is decommissioning by bankruptcy.

Mr. Mark Simmonds (Boston and Skegness): Does my hon. Friend think that, if a tie-up agreement could be negotiated, other EU countries would stick to it?

Mr. Hayes: The Minister has personal experience of this, and I am grateful to my hon. Friend for drawing it to the House's attention. There was a tie-up agreement off the north-west coast in the early part of 2000—the hon. Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood (Mrs. Humble) will speak about this with some authority—and the Fleetwood fishermen, being decent and law-abiding folk, abided by it. I was speaking to them only the day before yesterday. Large Dutch and Belgian boats exploited those waters, to the Minister's enormous embarrassment, and he had to trade off a share of our quota in the North sea to bribe them out of the place.

Mr. Morley: I did not.

Mr. Hayes: That is not what the Fleetwood fishermen say. I hope that you will forgive me, Mr. Deputy Speaker, if I give rather more credence to what they say on this occasion. I am sure that the hon. Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood joins me in my high regard for those hard-working fishermen.

Mrs. Humble *rose—*

Mr. Hayes: I see that she is about to do so.

Mrs. Humble: Tempted as I am, I must intervene. The fishermen of Fleetwood saw the relevance and importance of the cod recovery programme, so they actively engaged in the debate. However, in the first year of the programme, they had concerns about which parts of the Irish sea were closed down. My hon. Friend the Minister met a delegation of fishermen in London and listened to what they had to say. That early closure was varied to take the views of the Fleetwood fishermen into account. I hope that the hon. Gentleman agrees that the way forward is to listen to fishermen's expertise and their knowledge of their own areas.

Mr. Hayes: The hon. Lady makes a separate but equally valuable point. Her point is different from that of my hon. Friend the Member for Boston and Skegness. She reminds the House that, when the tie-up agreement was enforced, the fishermen became aware that it was at the wrong time and in the wrong place because the cod had already spawned and moved on. The fishermen knew that before the scientists and drew it to the attention of the hon. Lady, the Minister and the scientists. To his credit, the Minister took note. That leads us to conclude that the fishermen must be involved in all these exercises from the beginning. There must be a partnership between scientists and fishermen. Too often, fishermen have been left out until it becomes clear that they know a great deal about fish stocks and the industry. I should have thought that that was obvious, and I am sure that the hon. Lady agrees.

Mr. Carmichael: The hon. Gentleman makes a compelling argument in favour of regional management. Can I take it that he will join us in the Lobby tonight to support the Liberal Democrat amendment?

Mr. Hayes: I always take Liberal Democrats seriously, usually in the Tea Room, where we enjoy many interesting discussions on this and other subjects.

Andrew George: More seriously than the Tories?

Mr. Hayes: The hon. Member for St. Ives (Andrew George) knows what I mean. I shall talk later about our history together in fishing. He propped me up on a boat in the middle of the ocean when I was about to fall down. It could have caused a by-election, but he saved not only me but the people of South Holland and The Deepings from that experience. However, the point of the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Carmichael) deserves serious treatment, and I will address it later.

As well as meeting fishermen from Fleetwood and the east coast, I have also had the privilege, due to the generosity of the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan, of meeting a group of Scottish fishermen's wives. Tragically, they tell a similar sorry tale. Let us look at the effect of a dramatic reduction in white fish takes in Scotland. Let us consider the dependence of the east coast of Scotland on fishing and the proportion of people in the local economy engaged and employed in the industry. The hon. Member for Banff and Buchan has the chart, and I am familiar with it. Fishing is responsible for anything between 20 and 60 per cent. of the employment in some of those communities, either directly or indirectly. Then there is the knock-on effect on the local economy and communities. Imagine the effect on the retail or service sector if we dramatically reduce the fishing income to those communities. I was genuinely moved by those ladies and I will not let them down.

It is predicted that about 30,000 jobs will be at risk in that part of Scotland, and some 175 boats have already gone. How can we talk about a baseline? How can we talk about the contribution that we have already made or, as the hon. Member for Blackpool, North and Fleetwood pointed out, the commitment that fishermen have already made to this programme of balance, conservation and restructuring?

All those things are being done in the name of conservation, as we heard from the Minister again today. He is as consistent on that subject as he is on industrial fishing. In 2001, he said:

> "The CFP is not a great conspiracy . . . Its overwhelming priority is conservation."—[*Official Report, Westminster Hall*, 20 March 2001; Vol. 365, c. 51WH.]

By that measure, the common fisheries policy is palpably a complete and utter failure. Even if we could forget what it has done to the fishing industry and to the morale of those communities, we have only to think

[Mr. Hayes]

about what it has done to fish. Uniquely, the policy has damaged both fish and the people who catch them. There is something Orwellian about that.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Mr. Hayes: Talking of Orwell, I am happy to give way to my hon. Friend.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, even for that accolade.

Is not it high time that we examined the CFP? It has been a disaster in every respect: for conservation, for employment in terms of the number of British boats and in respect of discards—the wasted fish that have to be put back. The Government should grasp the nettle, tear up the CFP and negotiate an entirely new fisheries policy with our partners.

Mr. Hayes: That lies at the nub of the problem. The House will admire my hon. Friend's stout defence of Cotswold fishermen. No one engaged in the fishing industry could fail to value his contribution. He is right: the CFP is at the centre of the problem.

However, there is a difference between Conservative Members, Labour Members, Liberal Democrat Members and minor party Members, although I share many of the concerns of the Liberal Democrats on this subject. The Liberal Democrats believe—we have yet to hear from the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan—that the CFP can be shoehorned, twisted or amended to meet the challenges and the crisis. We have been told that time and again for 20 years. We have been told that with honour and decency—the Minister does not lack decency—but we no longer believe it and nor do the fishermen. Fishermen have been divided on the matter, but their position is hardening against the CFP because they can no longer believe that it can be adapted to meet their needs.

Mr. Frank Doran (Aberdeen, Central): The hon. Gentleman ignores the fact that for 15 of the 20 years he mentioned we had a Conservative Government. I realise that he is relatively new to his Front-Bench post, but he may recall that there were regular debates on fisheries during the last Parliament when some of the key points related to why the Conservative Government signed up to the CFP in 1972. They did not see the policy as important so they threw it away.

Mr. Hayes: I do not want to be seduced by the hon. Gentleman into discussion of the murky business of how the CFP began when we entered the EU, but in this debate I shall neither defend nor attack previous Governments for their role in those matters, as that is not relevant to us at present. We have a Government who have to deal with the CFP and they have been in power for many years. The Minister has been in his post man and boy. We have to deal with the current situation. That is the imperative.

The CFP has been a disaster for conservation and for the fishing industry. I do not want to cast too many doubts on science. There is always a tension between the fishing industry and science, as I remember from when we examined these matters in the Select Committee and visited the fishing industry in this country and abroad. Indeed, I remember my dalliance in Galicia with the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell), when we visited a fish market in northern Spain looking for small fish because we wanted to uncover some dreadful scandal. In my broken Spanish, I asked for the small fish and we were directed to another shed. We got quite excited. His camera was at the ready—as it always is—and we ended up looking at sardines. Our plot came to nothing. There is always a tension between the science and the fishermen.

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby): To complete the story, the hon. Gentleman should have added that I photographed some minute monkfish and other small fish that should never have been landed.

Mr. Hayes: The hon. Gentleman makes an intelligent and serious point on the back of my anecdote. It cannot be emphasised too often that small fish are landed and sold. We know that there is a taste for small fish in southern Europe so there is a demand and a market for them. The idea that "black" fish are not marketed throughout Europe is nonsense, as he made clear.

The hon. Member for Scarborough and Whitby (Lawrie Quinn) made an interesting and valuable point during Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Question Time. He said that enthusiasm for the regulatory regime to control such fishing, and the willingness of inspectors to act, varies across the countries of Europe. In Peterhead, there are more people checking up on the fishing industry than there are policemen. There are more inspectors monitoring everything that our fishermen do than any other officials. Is that true in the fishing ports of southern Europe? I suspect not. That is what the hon. Gentleman was alluding to when he spoke earlier.

Mr. Malcolm Savidge (Aberdeen, North): I agree about the importance of stopping black fishing and clamping down on it in foreign ports, but we should also acknowledge that we should check on it in our country, although that may not be popular. We constantly hear stories about it both from the catching and the processing sides. It is vital that we have the strictest possible standards and the greatest possible compliance and co-operation in our industry, because we are in crisis.

Mr. Hayes: Typically, the hon. Gentleman makes a fair point. Of course, we have to be diligent and standards must be high. Inspection must be carried out openly, properly and fairly. No one would deny that. I was picking up on an earlier point: I am not confident that standards are universally applied with the same vigour, openness and straightforwardness as the hon. Gentleman advocates.

The arguments about science, are not about the analysis of declining white fish stocks, as I think we would all acknowledge. That decline is taking place in Norway and in other countries; even as far away as Canada there is a problem with cod stocks. The argument is about what the scientists are not taking into account: the measures that have already been taken.

The Minister generously acknowledged that. However, until those things are taken into account, we cannot come to a balanced view about the likely factual and statistical outcome of the measures that are likely to implemented. Scientific analysis cannot be partial; it must be holistic and comprehensive or the industry is bound to question it. Indeed, it is bound to be invalid.

There has been no proper scientific analysis of the real effects of industrial fishing. Canada and Norway have reduced their cod quotas due to the problems with white fish. Incidentally, haddock quotas in Norway have risen by more than 80 per cent. during the past year. That would be a dream for our fishermen.

Until we have comprehensive, holistic, wide-ranging and believable science, which has integrity and can be trusted by the House and people involved in the industry, there will always be a tendency to distrust what we are being told. I refer to tension, and we must not increase that tension by producing a partial picture. We have been given no projection, no plan and no notional figures concerning the effect of further restrictions or decommissioning. The Minister said that the process will take a long time, but I want to see notional figures and good arguments based on comprehensive science.

Our fleet is at breaking point because it can do only so much restructuring—once the fleet has gone, that is it. One cannot restructure nothing. We know that there are exceptional numbers of codlings and young haddock in the North sea because this has been an unusual year, as the Minister will know. If we get rid of our fleet, it will not be able to take advantage of those fishing grounds when young fish grow to maturity and can be harvested.

In the meantime—I make no apology for returning to this issue—Norwegian and, in particular, Danish industrial fleets continue unabated to catch sandeels for fish food. It takes about 8lbs of wild fish to produce 1lb of farmed salmon. If we do not tackle industrial fishing, with its million tonne quota, these proposals will just be for show. Industrial fishing destroys the food source of mature fish and, via the bycatch of between 50,000 and 100,000 tonnes of cod and other species, it destroys mature and juvenile fish. As we know, there is anecdotal evidence suggesting that the latter are not always discarded. Without measures to curb that shameful situation, we cannot in all conscience expect our fishing industry to commit itself once again to changes recommended by Europe and, today, by the House. We want a degree of balance and fairness in our handling of this matter, and industrial fishing is neither balanced nor fair.

One of the deepest ironies is that because of the greater numbers of sandeels in Norwegian waters, cod stocks are migrating towards that area so that they can feed more easily. Are we really saying that we will stop British fishermen using their 120 mm nets while industrial fishermen continue to use their 16 mm or even 8 mm nets? We cannot do so with any pride or decency.

I am now going indulge in the "irrational Euroscepticism" suggested by the Minister because I like to live up to my stereotype. I do not want to disappoint him, and I would not want anybody to say that I was not on top form. I shall set the matter in context. The European proposals are not principally about conservation, although there is concern about that. They are not even about fishing at all; they are about European integration and the subordination of our national interests to central direction. Competency for fishing lies within the Commission, and the proposals come not from our Ministers or the Government but from EU Commissioners through treaty obligations about which the Minister has little to say because he has little control over them. I do not blame the Minister for that because it is a simple fact of life.

The Prime Minister must take the lead on this. He must face up to our European partners. We are sending our second XI to the current fishing negotiations. The matter must be elevated. We should say that fishing matters. The Prime Minister should take it up personally and raise it in the corridors of power in Europe. Ultimately, we must have the courage to take control of these matters, but not through a regional or zonal system. That would simply create many common fishing policies. We would have a multiplicity of centrally directed, bureaucratic and insensitive policies.

Sir Robert Smith: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Lawrie Quinn (Scarborough and Whitby) *rose—*

Mr. Hayes: I will not give way because I want to make progress and the Minister is chivvying me to conclude my remarks. He does not like it and he is looking up at the clock, thinking, "How long is this going to go on? I can't take much more of this pain and punishment." I do not want it said that I will be the man to inflict that pain on him. I will give way to the hon. Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine (Sir Robert Smith) after I have given way to the hon. Member for Scarborough and Whitby (Lawrie Quinn), who made such an important point about regulations.

Lawrie Quinn: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his comments. The name of the place that I represent is Whitby, not Whitney.

Mr. Hayes: I did say Whitby.

Lawrie Quinn: There seems to be a problem of geography, but never mind. The hon. Gentleman is welcome to come to Whitby whenever he likes.

The hon. Gentleman gave a compelling diagnosis of the problems in the industry. I am sure that many people in the ports that I represent will have found his comments sensible, but they will be waiting for answers. Everyone in the House would like him to provide the answers, rather than going down the well trodden route taken by previous Conservative spokesmen and spouting Eurosceptical dogma.

Mr. Hayes: None of my Eurosceptic views is dogmatic. I am familiar with Whitby. How could I not be familiar with the birthplace of Captain Cook?

Lawrie Quinn *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Hayes: Captain Cook was not born in Whitby? He lived there. There is a huge statue of him in Whitby and he had associations with the town. I am not going

[Mr. Hayes]

to give way so that the hon. Gentleman can correct me. I will give way instead to the hon. Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine.

Sir Robert Smith: I am concerned that the hon. Gentleman dismisses regional management too quickly when many in the industry view it as crucial. Fish do not respect national boundaries, and it is far more important to manage what happens within the regional fishing area, such as the North sea. If we did not have management across the whole of the North sea, over-fishing on one side would have meant recovery programmes on the other side failing completely. The industry has been demanding regional management, so that those who are affected by the decisions have a say in the results.

Mr. Hayes: The industry would have said that once. When, as a member of the Select Committee, I looked at these matters in great detail, that view was expressed by some in the industry. However, there was division and some believed in national control. Now the industry has changed its view because it is increasingly coming to believe that we can no longer pretend that the common fishery can be made to work. It is rotten at its very core.

The hon. Gentleman made sound points about local sensitivity and about involving the industry through proper collaboration and consultation. There is also a need for proper co-operation between nations. The Minister wrote to me in October, saying, sensibly, of course we need "international agreement and co-operation." However, he said in the same paragraph:

"A common approach is essential to tackle European fisheries under the auspices of the common fisheries policy."

That is the error—we can have international agreement and co-operation, which is an inevitable part of dealing with fishing because, as the hon. Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine rightly says, fish know no boundaries. However, the accountability for that, and the management of it, should be vested in nation states. The Minister looks surprised, but he knows that that is precisely what happens in some of the most successful fishing nations in the world, including New Zealand, Namibia, Iceland and Norway.

Mr. Morley: The hon. Gentleman is, to use a fishing phrase, going a bit adrift. Theoretically, of course, a number of fisheries nations can pursue different policies, but we share the North sea and the English channel. Is the hon. Gentleman suggesting that we draw a line down the middle and have one catch on one side of the line and a different catch on the other? Should we have different mesh sizes on each side of the line? That is not a conservation policy; it is anarchy. No matter what terms the hon. Gentleman uses, there has to be a common framework in European waters.

Mr. Hayes: The hon. Gentleman is being a little disingenuous because he knows very well that the countries with governance of their own waters that I have mentioned—I could have listed many others—have agreements of the type that he describes. He knows very well that the European Union has an agreement with Norway; he was talking about negotiating such an agreement only a few moments ago, when he was challenged on why he will not let the fishermen around the table given that Norway is very happy to do so. Of course there are agreements on the very subjects that he describes, but the fact is that the governance and accountability for the policies that a nation develops about its fishing industry should rest where sovereignty rests—and sovereignty should rest in the House.

I feel sorry for the Minister because with all his knowledge—I have acknowledged his understanding of such matters—and all his good intentions, the truth is that he cannot do many of the things that he would like to do. He is stuck in an amalgam, in which people always want to find some shoddy compromise, rather than to pursue the genuine interests of the nations of Europe.

Lawrie Quinn *rose—*

Mr. Hayes: I will let the hon. Gentleman intervene again, so long as he does not talk about Captain Cook.

I refer not only to the interests of Britain because the Minister will know that the common fisheries policy has been a disaster not just for Britain, but for many European countries. I would make this argument if I were a representative of several other countries of Europe. For example, the hon. Gentleman will know that the EU has had to buy African fishing rights. There are very real concerns about the cost and effect of that on those African nations. Not only have they suffered from deaths caused by the very large boats using their waters, but their own fishing industries have been damaged economically, and their local communities have been damaged by those activities. That has happened in a desperate effort to prop up the Spanish industry, so the Spanish industry, which has also declined, has suffered from the common fisheries policy. This is not a narrow or xenophobic point because I am not a narrow or xenophobic person.

Lawrie Quinn: I am most grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way for a second time. He has demonstrated his prowess as a student of history and geography this afternoon. My hon. Friend the Minister asked him about a putting a north-south line down the centre of the North sea, but where would the hon. Gentleman put a line between the Scottish and English fisheries? The right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Mr. Beith) is here, and I am sure that he would be very interested to hear the hon. Gentleman's answer to that question.

Mr. Hayes: That problem is not as significant as the hon. Gentleman pretends.

Lawrie Quinn *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Hayes: Well, many of the issues that we are debating today are common to the industries of Scotland and England. We talk about conservation, aid to the communities, the effect of the changes and the impact of regulation and inspection, but there is not much difference between the impressions of English fishermen and those of Scottish fishermen.

Mr. Salmond *rose—*

Mr. Hayes: Before I give way to the hon. Gentleman—I do not want him to breach the unanimity

that I hope to achieve as I approach the last part of my speech—I wish to tell the hon. Member for Scarborough and Whitby, who raises the issue of my knowledge of geography and history, that he will be sorry to know, given my earlier remark that I am trained to teach history, whereas I have only an O-level in geography. I plead guilty to the point about geography, but not to that about history.

Mr. Salmond *rose—*

Mr. Hayes: I shall let the hon. Gentleman intervene very briefly because I want to make some progress.

Mr. Salmond: I know that the hon. Gentleman has been reading up, but he should be aware that the Conservative party and the Labour party combined in 1999 to transfer 40,000 square miles of Scottish waters to English jurisdiction, and I can tell him that that was opposed by every Scottish fisherman; there was no division on that.

Mr. Hayes: There are always local difficulties between those splendid nations that are happy to be part of this glorious United Kingdom, and I know that the hon. Gentleman celebrates precisely that.

Mr. Simmonds: May I assure my hon. Friend that the fishermen in Boston are against regional control—the regionalism that the Liberal Democrats purport to support—and very much for national sovereignty in fishing policy.

Mr. Hayes: I am delighted to hear that. As I said earlier, my hon. Friend is known as a doughty champion of the fishermen of Boston—they are largely cockle fishermen—and he will know that, in particular, they face environmental problems in the Wash and that those stocks have been affected by toxins and climatic change. He has taken up those matters with the vigour for which he has already become renowned since being elected.

We should follow the example of those countries that have had the courage to take control of their own fisheries policies. Although I acknowledge the fact that the Liberal Democrat amendment has merit, especially in its analysis of the problem and in emphasising many of the current problems that we face, I have to say that I do not buy the solution. The hon. Member for St. Ives has a deep knowledge of and a real commitment to fishing, but I suspect that the Liberal Democrats' fisheries policy is driven more by their overall policy on European federalism than by the interests of the fishermen.

In my judgment, as the debate becomes louder and more widely heard in the next few weeks and months, fishermen will conclude that the only way that we can really offer them a glimmer of hope is by having the courage to take control, rather than having to get involved in these rather grubby deals that are done behind the scenes in smoke-filled rooms without the fishermen being present, as we have already heard. *[Interruption.]*

Let me just deal with this point once and for all. If the Prime Minister was really concerned and fishing were a high priority for the Government and a dominant issue in European discussions, the Liberal Democrats' argument might hold some water, because the Prime Minister could then negotiate the sort of zone or regional system that they favour, but the truth is that none of that is so. Fishing will be abandoned; it will be traded off and given away as part of some bigger deal in the negotiations. That is the truth of the matter, and no one can dutifully and honestly advocate the reform of the common fisheries policy because it will not be made a priority or made to fit the needs of the British industry, nor those of several other European industries.

Mr. Savidge: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Hayes: I must make more progress. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will concede that I have been generous in giving way.

Of course the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan is a doughty champion of fishing interests in Scotland, but unlike the Liberal Democrats, who at least recommend some solutions to the problems of regional control, he identified the problems very cogently in his amendment but offers no solution. I hope that he will support me in saying that the United Kingdom should take control of such matters, but I rather doubt it.

I want to say a word about relative stability. The Government argue in their motion for the continuation of relative stability, which is at the heart of their approach. The Minister has previously argued many times that we are protected by that principle, but how can we share out EU resources among EU people and maintain the same size of United Kingdom fishing fleet? Of course the answer is that that cannot be done. Britain's share can only decrease, so we may say that too many British fishermen catching the for ever shrinking share of resources is the result of relative stability. The proposed solution will eliminate British fishermen, so fishermen ask: why just ban catching cod, haddock and whiting, which happen to be the fish that we catch? Is it solely because of the conservation issues? Fishermen are understandably sceptical—I say no more than that—about that kind of policy.

I have a number of questions for the Minister. Is it not the case that, in the past 20 years, there has been no serious effort to conserve fish stocks and that the Commission's only solution has been to reduce quotas and accelerate decommissioning, with the result that there has been the increase in discards, as he and the House know?

Industrial fishing has destroyed the food chain, so why has that been allowed to continue for so long? It is a scandal that our countrymen will be stopped from fishing with the large-mesh nets that I have mentioned, while allowing industrial fishing to continue to use 16 mm and smaller nets.

Will the Minister protect access to the deep-sea fisheries westward of the British Isles—an important new area for many Scots fishermen, where they have made significant inroads? I am afraid that they will suffer drastically under the new proposals, and we should have a commitment from the Minister on those matters.

Is it not true that the EU policy, which has destroyed the food source and causes adult fish to be dumped and baby fish to be sold, does not give nature much of a

[Mr. Hayes]

helping hand? Can we have a guarantee that enforcement—the issue raised by the hon. Member for Scarborough and Whitby—will not be a uniquely British phenomenon, and that compliance and serious commitment will be evident across the European Union?

In all of this, I am afraid that I have little faith in the Prime Minister. I read in *The Times* today that whereas most of us have pictures on our desk of our wife, our baby, our father or the Duke of Wellington, he has a picture of President Chirac! That is why I have little faith in the Prime Minister—he is not committed to British fishing and the British interest. He is not committed to the nation in this respect: he will sell us out in Europe, as was illustrated by his dismissive answer to a perfectly fair question that was put to him yesterday. He is preparing the industry for its demise. That is the truth of the matter.

We must not allow our fishing industry to be traded off in some disreputable EU deal. The Prime Minister could have said yesterday that aid, assistance and financial support for the communities of Britain that rely on fishing must be at least equivalent to those enjoyed by other countries. He could have said that, during any tie-up, all foreign boats must be made to honour any restrictions. He could have said that industrial fishing, which causes immense damage to the food chain and therefore to the level of food stocks for white fish, must be stopped. He could have said that conservation measures should be developed in partnership with the industry. He could have said that third country agreements must be urgently reviewed with the aim of a dramatic reduction in cost and in the damage that they do to the other countries. He could have said that we will defend our industry openly, honestly and purposefully—but I fear that I expect too much from him.

The cynical and contrived nature of EU politics means that many in the heart of Europe view the painful crisis faced by our fishermen and others as "beneficial". It is not beneficial to those hardworking, decent men, their wives and their babies, whom I have met in the past several weeks. It is not beneficial to their communities, to our land or to our nation. Let me tell the Minister, the House and our fishermen that the Conservatives do not share the Prime Minister's complacent acquiescence. We will champion the British fishing industry, and we will work with other parties who are prepared to share that campaign with the industry and with us. We will fight to secure the fishermen's future, because their battle is our battle, and it is emblematic of the battle for our nation, for our right to decide on policies that affect our communities. We will fight for our right to govern ourselves.

2.53 pm

Mr. Frank Doran (Aberdeen, Central): It is always interesting to hear the views of the Conservatives. I am sure that the hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr. Hayes) took comfort from the fact that his predecessor in post, the hon. Member for Congleton (Ann Winterton)—her constituency is that well known fishing port—is sitting directly behind him.

The hon. Gentleman was pulled up a little by my hon. Friend the Member for Scarborough and Whitby (Lawrie Quinn) on history. Perhaps if he had concentrated a little on history before making some of the points in his speech, he might have done a little better, especially in relation to his plaintive cries that the Prime Minister should pay more attention to the fishing industry. I remind him that the last time a Prime Minister put fishing at the top of the agenda, he gave the industry away, walked into the common fisheries policy, and created almost 30 years of turmoil in the Conservative party. I see the hon. Gentleman nodding at that, and I am grateful for an acknowledgement. The matter is being dealt with properly, and I am delighted that my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary is joined in the Chamber by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Scotland, to acknowledge the importance of the industry not just in the UK but particularly in Scotland.

Clearly, this is a difficult time for the industry. In all the years I have been attending fisheries debates, there always seems to be an air of crisis at this time of year. On this occasion, the crisis seems a little more real than on previous ones. That is no wonder, given the bombshells of the scientific evidence and the response from the Commission, especially the threat of a complete ban on cod fishing and severe restriction on other quotas—particularly white fish quotas—not just because of the state of those stocks, but because of the cod by-catch. That has caused real fears in the fishing industry.

There are many reasons why we are here today, some of which we understand, some of which we are still trying to learn about. There are some very important points to make, and I acknowledge the robust stance taken by my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary on the position that the Government will take in the Council negotiations next month. It is important that that be maintained to the bitter end.

My first point is that we are seeing a significant sea change in the way in which we look at the issue of conservation. In the past, with the odd exception of some effort control, the main tool has been limitation of catching. We have controlled it by quota, by technical measures and by gear changes, and it is clear that that has failed over the years. When one speaks to people in the industry, one finds that there is a great deal of cynicism about the effectiveness of controls on the catch. One prominent member of the industry recently said to me that catching controls would only have worked if we had had a policeman or inspector on every boat. Clearly, that would be ludicrous.

As the Under-Secretary pointed out, however, the industry has a history of black fish—and, sometimes, illegal fishing—of very high and often unnecessary discard rates, of wrong reporting, and sometimes of elaborate methods to circumvent the technology. I know from my experience in north-east Scotland that although the industry body, the Scottish Fishermen's Federation, makes tremendous efforts and takes a lead in introducing and encouraging new technological measures to limit catching in the North sea, not all members of the federation follow that lead. It is important that that be understood. If we accept that we are currently in a crisis, we must be realistic and honest, and the Under-Secretary was certainly honest.

The realities in the North Sea and other fishing grounds are such that there is enormous pressure on our fishermen, which is another part of the reality. It is part of the culture to catch fish while they are there—by the next visit, the fish will have moved on or someone else will have caught them. I understand that pressure. The most important thing about catching controls, however, was that they were an attempt to use biology as part of the process of making the scientific evidence relevant. The contribution of scientists to the debate, in using biological measures as the basis for establishing quotas, is entirely justified. That also enabled scientists to avoid any responsibility for the social and economic consequences of their advice.

What the Commission proposes is different. We have had attempts at effort limitation previously—in the early 1990s, when we had tie-ups and days at sea—but they have not lasted. However, that seems to be the direction in which we are heading, as the Commission proposes to impose effort control and limits on fishing capacity. If the result of scientific evidence is that our fishing boats are tied up in harbour, and fishermen cannot go out to earn their living to feed their families—or, in most cases, to service their substantial bank loans—the scientists are moving themselves right into the centre of the debate in terms of the socio-economic consequences of their decisions. There is a big difference between imposing a quota on a man who goes out to do his daily work of catching fish—which may or may not be there—and saying that he cannot do that. That marks a significant shift in the Commission's policy and the way in which it should be viewed. When the Under-Secretary attends the Council next month, I hope that that point will be borne heavily in mind. I know that he has heard, and will hear from, my colleagues from the north of Scotland in particular—they sit on the Opposition Benches—about how devastating the consequences of the Commission's proposals are. It is extremely important that all of that be borne in mind.

Because there are dire socio-economic consequences for the catching side, for the communities that rely on their efforts, and for the processing side, which still relies heavily on locally caught fish, there is no doubt that we face serious restrictions and that we need to implement strong conservation measures. The policy should lead to a sustainable fishing industry, and it is important to put it on the record that both sides of the industry have been working hard to develop policies for sustainability.

I recently received a report from the Fish Industry Forum entitled "Sustainable Seafood—Working Together". It has been submitted to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, and the objectives in the report are important. It wants

> "a profitable and sustainable seafood sector that competes internationally, is a good steward of the marine environment and provides good food and a significant contribution to a healthy diet for people in the UK and around the world."

Most important, the forum says:

> "We want to set up a new working partnership between government and industry."

We have waited years to hear that sort of language and it is a bit of a tragedy that it comes through only at a time of crisis in the industry.

The industry needs time and support to adjust. That is why I am particularly worried by the way in which the Commission approaches its responsibilities. It seems to be suggesting an abrupt, almost overnight, move from catching controls to very severe effort limitation, with no time for the industry to adjust and for the Government to introduce the necessary support measures.

It has always been a mystery to me why anyone should tolerate decisions on how the industry should operate from 1 January being taken in virtually the last days of December. That is one of the hazards that the industry faces. It is impossible to plan and for anyone to develop a proper operation for their business. I know that we are moving to multi-annual quotas, and they are to be welcomed, but it has taken a heck of a long time to get there. However, and more important, rapid change and abrupt turns need time to be implemented, and the Commission's proposals are not the best way to do that. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will bear that point in mind.

I refer to a recurrent theme at this time of year. I am concerned about the agenda for the Council meeting in December. The future of the CFP is being shoved on to the same agenda as all the other important issues that are traditionally debated at this time of year. I have spoken of crisis, but we in the House must work hard to be responsible and not talk up a crisis. It is easy for an Opposition to do that. I have been in opposition, and I know how often we did it. However, it is important not to talk up a crisis, because people's livelihoods are at stake. They are worried. Their bank manager is phoning up to tell them that he has been reading the local newspaper and about the crisis in the industry and asking whether they will be able to pay their loans next year. The pressure is on us now and not next year, when the measures may or may not bite.

I am deeply concerned about what has been the almost traditional approach of the Commission. It has introduced what appear to be draconian measures and puts them on the table on the basis that they will be discussed. However, that is done in the full knowledge that negotiation and settlement will take place much further down the chain. That is extremely worrying. However, I am even more worried this time, because there appears to be an attempt to trade off the annual negotiations against the longer-term review of the CFP. I am worried by the Commission's approach. I hope that my hon. Friend will recognise that the issues must be separated. The CFP must stand in isolation, and we must not be bullied by the Commission's threat of draconian measures into accepting measures that we would not otherwise accept.

My main concern is with the fish processing side of the industry. In modern times at least, there has been the assumption that, whatever happens in the North sea, the processing industry will be okay because it can survive on imports. It is true that a large proportion of the cod that is processed in Aberdeen, Peterhead and Fraserburgh is imported. It comes from Iceland, the Barents sea and some from as far afield as China. However, the industry makes it clear that it still relies heavily—the figure is about 60 per cent.—on the white fish caught in the North sea.

Mr. Michael Weir (Angus): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that what he says about imported fish applies to large processors? There are many small family firms in my constituency and they rely totally on fish landed at

[Mr. Michael Weir]

Scottish ports, principally Fraserburgh, Peterhead and Aberdeen. The closure of the fishery will destroy such firms. The large firms may be able to survive with imports, but the small ones cannot.

Mr. Doran: I understand that point entirely. The firms in my constituency range from small one-man businesses to larger companies.

Lawrie Quinn: Does my hon. Friend agree with the concern expressed on the quayside at Whitby about the Faroese, in particular, dumping stock, depressing the price and, therefore, compounding the problem that the industry faces?

Mr. Doran: Prices are falling because supplies are healthy from the Faroes and Iceland.

Mr. Savidge: My hon. Friend is making an excellent, balanced and comprehensive speech. As recently as last week, our producers in Aberdeen were telling us that, although it is true that some people can rely on imports, a number of local processors rely on perhaps as much as 85 per cent. of white fish caught locally.

Mr. Doran: My hon. Friend makes his point.

I have spoken to many processors and they express a range of views. The most consistent opinion that they express—this will probably cause dismay to many catchers who do not already know this—is that they support a total ban on cod fishing but that the quotas for haddock and whiting should be appropriate to the stocks. There will be a by-catch with the haddock and whiting, and many processors recognise that such a ban would cause great difficulties for many fishermen, particularly those who invested heavily in buying up cod quotas. They would face serious difficulties. It is not an easy choice and I do not pretend that it is. However, I know that my hon. Friend the Minister will bear such issues in mind in the negotiations.

The fish processing industry employs about 4,500 people. The figure constantly fluctuates, but processing is still a major industry in the north-east of Scotland. Even Aberdeen, which is a significant oil town and known as the energy capital of Europe, relies heavily on the fish processing industry. In fact, my recent discussions with the industry have concentrated as much, if not more, on labour shortages as on quotas. The industry is still a major contributor to the local economy. The industry will find it difficult if cuts to the haddock and white fish sector of the market take place on the scale suggested. The industry already faces a skills shortage and we might lose the skills that we have. We lost skills in the herring industry 20 years ago, and we do not want that experience to be repeated. A significant number of my constituents depend on the fishing industry, and skills have been acquired. Those skills are not transferable, and we want the industry to be sustained.

We face difficult times. I know from my private conversations with my hon. Friend the Minister that he fully understands the importance of the fishing industry to Scotland and to the whole UK. I know that he will fight our corner—this is the party political broadcast. It is important at any time of crisis to recognise that there may also be opportunities. For years in Edinburgh, London and Brussels, we have debated the need for a sustainable sea fishing industry. We have made some progress, but most of the time we have lurched between annual quota negotiations without too much sense of direction. Out of this crisis may come an opportunity to lay the ground for a properly structured system that is based on sustainability and tied to conservation measures that can guarantee a viable future for the industry.

3.9 pm

Andrew George (St. Ives): I beg to move, as an amendment to the motion, leave out from "fishing" to end and add:

"calls on the Government to resist any proposal for inappropriate and excessive cuts in fishing effort and Total Allowable Catches for 2003, to confirm the 6 and 12-mile access restrictions on a permanent basis, to continue relative stability (including the Hague Preference) and retain the Shetland Box, and to seek the early review of third country agreements; believes that future policies must be based on Regional Management Committees through which fishermen would work with scientists and governments to agree sustainable and fairly enforced zonal management for their local fisheries; and calls on the Government to work with the devolved administrations and the fishing industry to produce its promised strategy for the long-term sustainable future of the UK fishing industry and to seek backing for this strategy at meetings of the EU Fisheries Council."

Given that we have little more than two hours left, I shall do my best to be brief. Many hon. Members have a great knowledge of the fishing interests in their constituencies, so it is a pity that a disproportionate amount of time was taken up by the Tory Front Bench. Although I like the hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr. Hayes)—*[Interruption.]* I do not want to get into an argument about time, because that will only result in the loss of yet more time.

There is a gathering consensus among hon. Members who represent constituencies with a fishing interest. The Government motion is ostensibly about the common fisheries policy. A great tome has been presented to the House on aspects of that. It is clear that those who know about and understand fishing constituencies are coming to recognise the right and proper direction that the policy is taking.

The Liberal Democrats have not tabled the amendment because we disagree with the Government motion. Our concern is that it does not reflect the debate in the industry and the concerns about what might happen as a result of negotiations on future quotas for stock, especially around the UK's coast. It is important to ensure that the debate gives time to those issues. We want to put fire in the Minister's belly and hope he accepts that some of the science is questionable. He said that we should challenge the science if it can be robustly attacked on scientific grounds, and take our concerns to the Commission.

The question is whether we will sustain enough of the fishing industry in this country to make a debate on the future of the common fisheries policy worth while. The hon. Member for Aberdeen, Central (Mr. Doran) rightly said that we often debate the future of the fishing industry at this time of the year, and every year we are at various degrees of crisis management. Although I do

not want to say that we have cried wolf, it is important to realise that the issues are now so serious and deep that we have gone beyond crisis management. If the proposals by the Commission and ICES are accepted, they will have a significant impact on fishing communities not just in Scotland, but around all the UK's coast. The problem demands special measures and urgent attention. We need cross-party consensus on how to proceed. It is clear that the future of the fishing industry is far more important than narrow party political point scoring, which is often a factor in the debate. I will do my best to avoid that.

Lawrie Quinn: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his remarks. In that spirit, does he agree that it would be appropriate for fishing communities around the country for the Liberal Democrats to withdraw their amendment? They have in a sense provoked the debate, although it is not necessary to put fire in my hon. Friend's belly.

Andrew George: I am sure that the Government will accept our amendment after the Minister reflects on what my hon. Friends and I have to say on such serious issues. Our amendment embellishes and improves their motion.

Mr. Salmond: I think I have a way out of the impasse. If the Liberals and the Government accept the Scottish National party amendment, we will all be in agreement.

Andrew George: Enough of this jocularity. Let us get on with the main business.

The Minister said that his criticism of our amendment was minor because we have not incorporated the word "environmental", but Liberal Democrats do not need to do that. As we have tabled the amendment, it is self-evident that it is on the basis of environmental sustainability. We do not need to state that, but the Government clearly do.

We welcome the general direction of the common fisheries policy, which favours the implementation of multi-annual quotas. In the first year that I came into the House, I could not believe that we had to face 11th-hour brinkmanship. I suggested multi-annual quotas, but that was met with derision. So if they are successful, I want to claim some credit for them. If they are not, however, I might find someone else to blame.

Regional advisory councils are welcome but do not go far enough. I think the Minister accepts that we need regional management councils instead. They need teeth. It is clear from unilateral measures in one fishing zone in Scotland that the industry can benefit from a more localised shared concern about the future of a fishery in one region or zone. That is helpful.

Extension of the six and 12-mile limits is also important for sustainability, but the common fisheries policy is weak on the problem of industrial fishing. As I said, an impact study on industrial fishing is only now being considered for next year, but draconian measures are already being introduced to many other sectors. Attention is only just being turned to the full impact of industrial fishing.

The Government need to be certain that aquaculture, which is dealt with at the end of the papers, is properly assessed. We need to be sure that the sea has the capacity to enable that to happen. I hope that in developing aquaculture we will not deny or discourage hatchery projects. Those have been successful, certainly off the north Cornish coast, and we should encourage them.

We all agree that it is important to have a sustainable fishing industry. However, we must stick to sound science. Obviously, that raises questions about how sound the science is and whose science it is. I caution the hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings in appealing to the emotions of people in coastal communities by saying, "We will not let you down." The fact is that we will let them down if we do not stick to the sound science because they will end up with no fisheries for ever. If difficult decisions need to be taken, it is important that politicians are tough, strong and robust enough to see them through.

Much of the science has to be questioned. Serious and genuine arguments are being put forward by the industry to counter the science. Questions inevitably arise about the science itself. The science is not an unquestionable pronouncement of God. We must consider who is producing it and how sound it is. If it is based on a balance of probability using projections, who is doing the assessment, is it up to date, and are all the factors taken into account? The hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) gave alternative figures that challenged the science on the spawning stock biomass in a number of important fisheries. In fisheries in area VII—the western approaches—the hake recovery programme is showing a decrease, admittedly small, in mortality and an increase in the spawning stock biomass. Most of the science on cod in area VII comes from area VIId, where conditions are closer to those in the North sea, and does not take proper account of the state of cod in the western approaches and the Celtic sea. Some of those issues must be considered before making hard and fast decisions about managing and setting quotas for important species in those areas.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: I do not want to disturb the Liberal policy of squaring every circle, but is the hon. Gentleman saying that we should trust the scientists except in area VII?

Andrew George: No, I have already made my view clear. I accept the point made by the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan and a number of arguments by my hon. Friends who will speak later from a Scottish and Shetland perspective. I am making a general point that the science needs to be properly and robustly challenged on scientific grounds, not on emotional or political grounds. I was giving the example of stocks in area VII—the western approaches—particularly hake, but cod and haddock as well, because the subject would not otherwise be raised in this debate. I am glad that the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) gave me an opportunity to highlight that. There are serious uncertainties about the science and current information raises many questions. I therefore urge the Minister, instead of making hard and fast decisions that will affect the fishing effort from 1 January 2003—after all, fish stocks do not recognise human calendars—to take a more cautious approach, roll the debate forward if

[Andrew George]

necessary and keep a watching brief on critical fisheries. We would ultimately regret decisions that resulted in thousands of fishing jobs being lost overnight.

Ann Winterton: I am a little confused as to why the hon. Gentleman thinks that we will be able to make decisions to roll over the management of fisheries into the new year. He knows as well as anyone else that there is a cut-off date of 31 December and that Spain must be accommodated thereafter. The Commission makes the proposal, and the Minister only has 10 out of 87 votes in the Fisheries Council.

Andrew George: I have raised with Commissioner Fischler the issue of the six-mile and 12-mile limits. If they are not resolved, he has confirmed that there are ways of rolling forward the debate.

I do not want to spend much more time on the issue, as we do not have long and I know that other Members wish to speak. We need to look at alternatives such as selective and sophisticated local measures. The Cornish Fish Producers Organisation has proposed the closure of two areas in the Trevose ground. We need reassurance that the scientific advice is adequate. If recovery programmes are to be effective, we must look carefully at proposals to invest in them. If lay-ups, closed seasons and closed areas are to achieve a recovery of stock, it would be unwise to decommission vessels. We should find ways of funding their tie-up for an agreed period so that when stocks recover they can continue fishing.

The Minister has just left the Chamber, but I was just going to tell him that he is highly respected, resilient, sympathetic, sensitive and modest. Given that he was not born yesterday, he would wonder what all that flattery is leading to. It is this: can he go to the next Fisheries Council meeting and demonstrate not only knowledge, understanding, resilience, sensitivity and modesty, but passion? Once he has understood and taken on board the scientific issues and weighed the arguments about the balance of scientific evidence, will he fight for the fishermen? There have been stand-up rows between our Prime Minister and other Prime Ministers on other matters. Fisheries are of such importance to our country that I urge the Minister if necessary to engage the attention of the Prime Minister and other Ministers to ensure that the urgency of the situation is conveyed to European Ministers.

Mr. Morley: For the benefit of the House, may I point out that the Government are engaged at all levels? Indeed, this week, a representative from No. 10, a member of the Prime Minister's personal office, met me for a long briefing on where we are with these issues, our priorities and what we want to do. The hon. Gentleman should not think that we are not engaged with every single level of Government in every single region of the country.

Andrew George: That is reassuring, but we would like public evidence of that engagement.

Finally, we can take decisions in haste, but we would repent at leisure, which is why I urge the Minister to consider our amendment carefully. If many thousands of people were made jobless in the manufacturing sector because of the closure of a factory, special taskforces would be set up, public money would be invested and urgent plans developed to deal with the problems. The fisheries problem is of equal severity, and I hope that the Minister will take on board the seriousness of the issue, given his clear and intricate knowledge of the subject.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): Before I call the next speaker, a large number of hon. Members are seeking to catch my eye. Unless contributions are considerably briefer, some Members will be disappointed.

3.29 pm

Lawrie Quinn (Scarborough and Whitby): I shall try to keep my remarks as brief as possible, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and shall try to represent as best I can the interests of the fishing communities of Scarborough and Whitby. The hon. Member for St. Ives (Andrew George) and I both entered the House in 1997. Over the years, it has been a great pleasure to work together in the spirit of partnership that he has demonstrated this afternoon, and I shall take up where he left off.

From my perspective on the Government Benches, the Minister was right to draw attention to the interest and support coming from the highest levels of the Government. I hope that, through the Minister's work in future discussions at European level, we will be able to demonstrate to our fishing communities how seriously the Government take the issues facing the industry, as evidenced by the industry taskforce, which has been so important in my part of the world when the loss of other jobs has been threatened.

The fishing industry is linked to Scarborough and Whitby almost by an umbilical cord, and I want to consider some of the socio-economic effects of the current proposals on the people whom I represent. Earlier today, on behalf of the fishing community based in Whitby, I drew attention to the representations that I have received from Mr. Arnold Locker, a Whitby fisherman and the current chairman of the National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations. I understand that Arnold, with his colleagues from the NFFO, will be visiting the Minister early next week.

I take this opportunity, on behalf of colleagues from the North sea ports, to thank the Minister for the briefing that he is arranging for us next week. I, and the others who attend, will make the most of that. I was pleased to hear that hon. Members from all parts of the House will attend. That is as it should be; we should all listen and try to work on behalf of the communities that we represent.

At Question Time today, I raised the issue of enforcement. Mr. Locker asked me to convey to the House a clear message about the type of enforcement to which his boats, like the boats of most of the Yorkshire fishery, are subject. He tells me that the boats may be boarded three or four times a week, when they are out there trying to earn their living. Mr. Locker wants the Minister to argue as strongly as possible in future weeks for that approach to be replicated across Europe.

I was pleased to hear from Mr. Locker that he wanted more robust science— science that was more effectively supported, and would be more meaningful than what we

have heard in recent years. Having spoken to the fishermen in Scarborough and Whitby over a number of years, I was gratified to hear such clear and unambiguous support for science from such an important leader of the industry. I hope that the Minister will be able to build on that in his discussions with the NFFO next week.

I mentioned the impact on local communities. The people who live in the old town of Scarborough—the bottom-enders—have lived in that community and gained a livelihood from fishing for generations. The hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr. Hayes) referred to the number of deep-sea fishing vessels based in Scarborough and Whitby. I believe he said that there were four, but he did not mention the fact that over the years there has been a transfer of deep-sea vessels from the ports of Scarborough, Whitby and the rest of the North sea coast to the north-east of Scotland, as I am sure the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) would acknowledge.

Although the reference to the importance of the distinction between the English fishery and the Scottish fishery was dismissed, there is a strong historic link between my communities and those north-east ports. I say that in a spirit of solidarity, as we recognise that for every person involved in the fishing industry in England, there are probably three or more people working in the fishing industry in Scotland. We view the problem from a united community perspective.

The people of the old town in Scarborough and the fishing communities of Whitby are living on their nerves. They are so frightened. They are under pressure from the banks and from the people who try to help them with loans. There is a real sense that our communities are on the edge of a precipice. I hope that in his discussions with other members of the Government, the Minister will have regard to the serious psychological impact of the present situation on those communities. I hope that the public services will take account of the stress and trauma that relatively small but tightly knit communities such as mine are undergoing, and ensure that the appropriate support is available.

I take this opportunity to celebrate with the House the wonderful work done by organisations such as the Seafarers Mission and the fishermen's missions throughout the country. They are supporting fishing communities through extremely difficult times. In debates such as this it is traditional for the Minister to mention all the people who are, unfortunately, lost at sea as a result of their efforts to harvest the sea; perhaps he will do so in his concluding remarks. It is worth noting that the Whitby lifeboat has now celebrated 200 years of existence. That is an indication of how tightly knit that community is. We want to see fishing as a vibrant, sustainable way of making a living, and we want people to be able to go forward with the hope of future prosperity.

As the Minister knows, there was a small sign of hope for Whitby with the opening of the fishermen's apprentice school at the beginning of October. He has said that he will make every effort to visit the school in the new year, to see the work that is being done there. I can report to the House, including my hon. Friend, that people from as far afield as North Shields and further down towards Grimsby are showing great interest in the school as a centre of excellence. I hope that the skills and techniques being taught in that important facility will start to address in an English context some of the concerns highlighted by my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, Central (Mr. Doran) when he said that there was a drift of skills away from the industry. The school is a vital sign that the industry will not roll over and die without putting up a strong fight.

The hon. Member for St. Ives called for a fighting spirit. The families who fish, work and live along the coast of Yorkshire have a message for the House about the living that they earn from the North sea. They not only want the Minister to do his best for them—they know that from this Minister, they do get the best, because of what he has done for their industry—but they want a realistic approach that delivers for future generations. That is how they want me to express their views to the House today. After today's debate, we want to see some punches thrown by our fisheries Minister on behalf of the United Kingdom fishery—although we do not expect him to emulate the manner of the Deputy Prime Minister when he visited a certain north Wales town. We want to hear about a real fight—but not necessarily with shouting—for a sustainable future for our communities.

I have three questions for the Minister, which I hope he will be able to deal with in his closing remarks. First, diversification into the prawn fishery has been extremely important for boats that go out of Whitby, and we discussed earlier the important issue of by-catches. Will the Minister consider making representations or giving some confirmation for fishermen who have diversified about the dispensation for the by-catch? Will there be an opportunity to consider making even more effort with the prawn fishery?

Vera Baird (Redcar): As my hon. Friend well knows, I represent the constituency immediately to the north of Scarborough and Whitby. Redcar has a very tiny fishing industry comprising small boats. In the scale of things—but I suppose that that is a silly word to use in a fishing debate; I shall start again. In terms of content, a minute quantity of cod is involved, and those in the industry now fear two things. The first is that they will not be able to catch cod any more, and the second is that their second catch, which consists of prawns but inevitably includes a small by-catch of cod, will also be stopped or severely restricted because of that minute—and, I would suggest, pretty inconsequential—by-catch. Can the Minister do anything to reassure them that they will not have to sustain a double collapse of their current means of living?

Lawrie Quinn: I am grateful for that intervention. My hon. and learned Friend put the argument far more succinctly than I could—but I am a mere simple engineer, whereas she obviously really is learned as well as honourable.

Mr. Morley: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way. I might be able to help both him and my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Redcar (Vera Baird). We have obviously been considering take-up and quotas in different parts of our fishery. The Thames inshore fleet accounts for only about 2 per cent. of the cod quota. In that respect, referring back to my

[Mr. Morley]

comments about low impact sustainable fisheries, I want to see whether I can make special arrangements for those sectors, and I shall try to do so.

Lawrie Quinn: I am sure that all fisherman in north-east England will be grateful to hear that response so swiftly.

Secondly, I have a question about the situation of the netsmen and the people who go for salmon. The Minister and his officials have been helpful in terms of dialogue and the bridge that I have tried to build for licence holders and netsmen based in Whitby. As a result, considerable progress has been made in getting a sustainable result for this important industry. Will he maintain a strong personal interest in how that situation evolves, recognising that the fishermen concerned are also involved in the shellfish fishery? Will he also have regard to opportunities and development support work in marketing that important fishery?

I know that the Minister's officials have looked into the important contribution that species such as the velvet crab might make. That product is very marketable, especially in the Iberian sector. On the basis that most of the shellfish landed at the port of Whitby seem to be placed in refrigerated lorries and sent across the country to the fish markets of Paris and Barcelona, a strong contribution could be made in relation to my demand that the fishing industry and community be kept tightly knit together in Whitby. I hope that the Minister will consider that important point.

Finally, there are parallels between the fishing industry and the other major heavy production industries in the economy. The Minister will have recognised in his community of Scunthorpe the changes and the problems that the steel industry has faced. He knows that my background is in the railway industry, and he is aware of the changes that have occurred in transport engineering in the city of York and the north Yorkshire area. I am sure that he knows about the impact of that great change on coal mining communities. Will he use his best efforts to ensure that there is greater engagement, especially in the English regional development agencies, in recognition of the fact that those communities are on a knife edge? They are waiting for something to happen. They think that it will be awful; indeed, many Members here share their fears. Those communities need support and assistance from the Government to see them through some dark days. I hope that the Minister will make clear representations to Commissioner Fischler, and have regard to the fact that if the provision of social support for fishing communities is good enough for other European countries, we certainly want to see it in the United Kingdom—in Yorkshire, and in Scarborough and Whitby.

3.45 pm

Ann Winterton (Congleton): This debate is being held at a critical time for the future of the United Kingdom fishing industry, which has perhaps finally realised that it is facing a cliff face. Those in the industry say that the matter is now becoming political and has nothing to do with common sense. In the few words that I am about to say, I hope that I can show them why they are right, how the matter is political and how that will adversely affect their future.

To understand the future, we need to look at the past. Thirty-one years ago, the House of Commons was misled during debates in which it was suggested that we were entering what was portrayed as a common market. Members of Parliament were assured that our fishing industry was safe and that our fishermen were protected by the British veto, when the true situation was quite the reverse. Seventeen years ago, the House of Commons was misled once again. During debates on the accession of Spain and Portugal, we were led to believe that the 1983 agreement sharing the stocks among member states was the common fisheries policy that we had signed up for. Spain was portrayed as having been successfully accommodated in the common fisheries policy with no future threat to our national fleet.

For the past 31 years—and, indeed, in today's debate—there has been little mention of the acquis communautaire that we originally accepted on taking up our membership, as do all new entrant countries to what is now called the European Union. The management system of 1983, which consisted of quota cuts and decommissioning, has not provided one successful fishery. Speaker after speaker has seconded that view. The real aim of that system was to enable the integration of the individual fishing fleets of the member states into a single European fleet operating in the already declared and accepted single European Union pond. If the industry does not understand that that is the core of the problem, no one will be able to prevent the eradication that will come.

The maritime cake comprises the available resources from all member states—the waters in their exclusive fishing zones plus any temporary agreements negotiated with third countries. Our nation, the United Kingdom, contributed the largest proportion to that maritime cake. It is surely obvious that, as other nations join, they will look to our slice and to United Kingdom waters for their equal share. The same applies when time-limited agreements with third countries are not renewed and the participating countries require a bigger slice of remaining resources. I hasten to add that that is always inevitably to the detriment of the United Kingdom. After all, the one basic principle of the common fisheries policy under the acquis communautaire is to provide

"An equitable standard of living for the population which depends on fishing for its livelihood."

The cod situation has created the beneficial crisis needed to ensure that the Commission can achieve that goal. The cod and hake recovery programme containing the details of the new management system will be adopted: let there be no doubts or misunderstandings about that. Faced with a choice between total closure and greatly reduced effort, Ministers will accept the latter.

As John Farnell, Fisheries Minister in the Scottish Parliament, recently said to that Administration's Rural Development Committee,

"The main driver for reduction of the fleet"—

Mr. Salmond: Will the hon. Lady give way?

Ann Winterton: Let me finish.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Ann Winterton: If hon. Members sat quietly and listened—[HON. MEMBERS: "What was his name?"] I intend to repeat not his name but his words. At least, I shall begin to repeat what he said. If hon. Members disagree with his views, they can let the House know that.

Mr. Salmond: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Hon. Members should know that Mr. Farnell is a European Commission official, not a Fisheries Minister in the Scottish Parliament.

Ann Winterton: I beg the House's pardon if I am mistaken. I slipped up when reading my notes and I apologise for that. However, John Farnell's words constitute the vital point. He said:

"The main driver for reduction of the fleet will no longer be Community legislation with targets for capacity to be achieved at the end of a given time; rather, it will be the economic consequences of having to live with fishing effort limits."

He continued:

"We believe that much of the fleet will decide to move out of fishing because it will be difficult for vessels to remain profitable with some of the fishing effort limits that might be necessary for conservation."

That majority will be the British, mainly the Scots. A trail of deprivation and social problems will ensue in our coastal communities.

It sickens me to the core to think that those years of deception, as European Union integration drove quietly and surreptitiously onwards, will result in the eradication of a way of life and of skills built up and passed down from generation to generation.

Before anyone asserts that we are protected by relative stability, let me emphasise the genuine difference between the principle and the application keys that were determined under it. Why do people imagine that successive British Governments signed designation orders for every member state, including Austria and Luxembourg, allowing them to catch all species outside the 12-mile limit? How will relative stability protect vessels with different quota allocations for cod, haddock or whiting when the Commission's proposal prevents any vessel that has exhausted the days allocated for cod from going to sea to catch other species, even if some of the quota remains?

John Farnell informed the Rural Development Committee of the Scottish Parliament that allocation keys should be reviewed every five years,

"in order to ensure that they correspond to real fishing interests, as opposed to interests on paper".

The quota that British vessels were given in 1983 does not reflect the current structure of the fleet.

I am delighted that the important issue of the food source has been raised. The food chain continues to be broken by industrial fishing. Many people do not know that it takes 4 kg of fish to produce 1 kg of fish meal pellets. It takes 2 kg of pellets for a salmon to grow 1 kg in weight. Raising a farmed salmon that weighs 2 kg requires 16 kg of industrial species. Cod also rely on that food to survive in the wild. They are therefore deprived of the feed that they need to survive, grow and reproduce. If there is no food for the fish, is it surprising that they move to areas where they can find sustenance? After all, as has been said many times, the sea has no boundaries.

What do our fishermen face in January 2003? The relevant area covers almost the whole UK 200-mile limit. Fishermen face a restriction on their days at sea in the form of kilowatt days, a multiple of time at sea and engine size. Vessels that have no record of catching cod or hake will have to discard every single fish of those species that they find in their nets.

When days at sea are used up, the vessel will not be allowed to put to sea again in the relevant area. Any reduction in time at sea will destroy the whole white fish fleets in areas such as Shetland, Peterhead and the north-east, and the hake fleets from the south-west.

The Advisory Committee for Fisheries Management has proposed a complete ban on landing cod, haddock and whiting while promoting an increase in the total allowable catch for saithe or coley. Under the current relative stability keys for the UK, the share of the North sea quota is 47 per cent. of cod, 78 per cent. of haddock and 53 per cent. of whiting, but 17 per cent. of saithe. Most of the latter falls to France and Germany.

It is ironic that British fishermen have claimed for more than five years that the scientific advice on, and subsequent TAC for, saithe is not in line with what they were catching and discarding. Yet the scientists have decided to increase their assessment by more than 30 per cent. only now, when most British vessels will be tied up and unable to benefit from it. That provides more evidence, if it were needed, that British vessels are to be forced out of business to save the rest of the European fleet.

The only realistic answer is for the UK Parliament to assert its undoubted authority and restore fisheries policy to national control. Some of those who are listening may believe that that policy is extreme. A Liberal Democrat Member described it in precisely those terms on South West Television. However, in the early 1990s, a fishermen's leader from Senegal visited the south-west. He asked for help to prevent the CFP from destroying the lives of many artisanal fishermen who were run down in their open pirogues at night by vessels from the European Union that were permitted to fish Senegal's waters through a third country agreement.

An article in "Classic Boat" magazine in September stated that in 2000, 300 fishermen from Mauritania were drowned after the European boats sank their indigenous craft, often at night. Those responsible were fined a mere £3,500 and, in some circumstances, let off scot-free.

I therefore emphasise to Liberal Democrat Members that continuing to support the CFP in any form is to support an extreme regime that destroys fish stocks and the livelihoods of our fishermen. It has destroyed the lives of fishermen from the west African states that I mentioned.

Taking extreme action now is the only way in which to halt the extreme predicament of fishermen. They are staring disaster in the face because of the eradication of the white fish sector in the north-east and Shetland. The predicament is caused by the EU's pressing need to

[Ann Winterton]

accommodate the Spanish fleet, which has waited 16 years for equal access to the common resource under the terms of its accession treaty. Other countries are waiting to join in 2004. Poland in particular has huge fisheries interests.

The way forward, if we had the political will, is to stop the impending disaster in its tracks by doing what the hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) attempted in 1996. I am glad that he is in his place today. He promoted a Bill to introduce national control. One of its sponsors was the current Leader of the Opposition, who was present earlier to listen to part of the debate.

The Fisheries Limits (Amendment) Bill sought to amend the European Communities Act 1972. European legislation can be incorporated in UK law only through that Act. Are the Government prepared to take that action? It would not mean that we had to leave the European Union.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for giving way, although she might not like the reason for my intervention. I accept her lavish praise for my 1996 Bill—it was a brilliant Bill—but I must remind her that it received practically no support from the Conservative Government at the time.

Ann Winterton: The hon. Gentleman makes a fair point, but that was then. We are now facing the meltdown of the United Kingdom's fisheries. The situation is so dire that politicians who are elected to the House—those in Government in particular; after all, it is they who propose measures, not Back-Bench Members—must take action. I hope that he will join me in encouraging his Government to follow the excellent example that he set many years ago, when he had the foresight to know what needed to be done.

I ask again: are the Government prepared to take the action that I have outlined? Would the other political parties in the House support such a move? I have no hesitation in saying that the Liberal Democrats would not, because their declared policy is unequivocal support for further European integration. *[Interruption.]* It is. That is well known, and no Liberal Democrat Member has got up to deny it.

Mr. Carmichael: We are hoping that the hon. Lady will sit down.

Ann Winterton: I have given way to interventions, but I shall be as quick as I can so that the hon. Gentleman can speak.

If we are not prepared to act in the best interests of our country, we relinquish our responsibilities to our constituents. Those hon. Members who represent coastal constituencies, in particular, will need to think carefully about this. If they are honest, they should tell their constituents that they support the unelected European Commission having the control and management of this vital resource—a resource that, by Act of Parliament and under international law, belongs to the British people.

The common fisheries policy has a track record of producing social and environmental disaster of unbelievable proportions in United Kingdom coastal communities. Those who wish this policy to continue in any form have already decided that the interests of European Union integration come before the interests of the United Kingdom. I am one of those who believe that the interests of our country and its people are paramount, and we have one last chance to save the British fishing industry. I hope that we do not fail it.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): Order. Clearly, a considerable number of right hon. and hon. Members want to catch my eye. I therefore urge them to make shorter speeches.

4.3 pm

Mr. Austin Mitchell (Great Grimsby): I do not think we have ever had a fisheries debate that has been surrounded by such an air of gloom, particularly from the fishing organisations. The DEFRA officials in the Box have not even smiled once during it, so I take it that the situation is fairly serious. I have been worried that the crisis has been hyped up by the Commission as a justification for more draconian changes to the common fisheries policy. I was not going to voice that suspicion, because I want to advance my career in the Labour party. My hon. Friend the Minister has, however, given us his "less Eurosceptic than thou" peroration. I accept that there is pleasure to be gained from jumping on the guilt scars and the Heath complexes of the Conservatives, who are so embarrassed by the situation that they have created that they have not even bothered to attend this afternoon's debate, in contrast with every other party.

It is fair to recognise that we are in this crisis largely because of the common fisheries policy. A policy that is based on equal access to a common resource cannot provide for effective conservation in a way that a nation state controlling its own waters—and making swap arrangements with other countries on that basis—can do. In Europe, politics is more important than conservation. There has been a tendency to give everyone a catch, to trade catches, to make room for incoming states such as Spain, and to dole out catches by means of quotas, which is an inherently bad means of conservation. Those faults are implicit in the policy and it would be unreasonable not to recognise that.

If the nation that contributes two thirds of the stocks to the so-called common market pool—which once had the richest fishing grounds in Europe and which needs a healthy fishing industry and healthy fishing communities—has to accept the biggest cuts in its efforts and its fleets, that outcome will be totally unacceptable to the House. That will be compounded if we maintain for too long the current policy of accepting only minimal grants from Europe. Other fishing industries have done far better out of grants from the common fisheries policy than we have, partly because of the Fontainebleau agreement, which means that the Treasury does not want to make its contribution. It would be unreasonable to see other industries financed to take the stocks—when they build up—that our industry cannot because it has not been adequately financed. We need to make that point to the Government.

I have every faith in my hon. Friend; he has been an excellent Minister. He has done well for the fishing industry and consulted it closely. He has to build up coalitions in Europe, however, and we cannot therefore expect pristine clarion declarations from him. It is fair to point out, however, that fishing organisations have questioned the science, and I believe that they should do so. They have pointed out that the measures make no allowance for the fact that fishing effort has been falling while the stock biomass has been increasing, and that there has been no time to assess the new measures involving mesh sizes, and fleet reductions produced by decommissioning, particularly in Denmark. They also point out that the advice can be contradicted in some areas—perhaps only in area VII, although I have heard of this in other areas, too—by the practical experience of the fishermen.

It is fair to point out that the advice from the scientists is tentative; it is not absolute. I shall quote them:

"This is the first step in establishing linkage.

It is too early to take existing recovery measures into account.

The numerical veracity of linkage is not endorsed.

This is a new untested mixed fishery model.

The calculations are not validated."

If we were to allow the scientists to produce a ban—particularly on North sea cod—we would be making a serious mistake.

It would be ludicrous if we did not ban industrial fishing in this situation. The hon. Member for Congleton (Ann Winterton) made the point earlier that this is the equivalent of killing eight cows to produce one genetically modified cow. That is the feeding ratio of fish caught in industrial fishing to farmed fish. The industry could not accept a situation in which draconian cuts were made, but industrial fishing carried on. There is always a by-catch, a catch of immature, juvenile fish that will grow up, and I think that we have to have that.

There is a case, too, for postponing the advent of Spain in the system. I know that it has a legal right to join, but it is going to want to establish a track record. It is unrealistic to expect that it will not fish in these areas. If it establishes a track record, there will be by-catches and discards, and it will have to put back species that it is not allowed to catch—that is, most of them. We cannot afford that further damage to the stocks.

It is right that the regional advisory committees, which are a very tentative part of the Commission's proposals, should, in fact, be regional management councils. That is what the industry wanted when it adopted that measure as a means of giving the stakeholders, the fishermen, a say—in fact, giving them management and control—in the catching in their area. We must beef up those committees to that level very quickly, because only they can apply the specific measures that specific areas need. The National Federation of Fishermen's Organisations has said that it is prepared to talk about the targeted, special measures that are needed—indeed, it should talk about them. Those measures would be a far better way of dealing with this situation than an outright ban. The NFFO lists the following suggestions:

"Targeted decommissioning

Closed seasons

Closed spawning areas

Closed nursery areas

Funded voluntary tie-ups

More selective fishing gear".

I would add a one-net rule to that list. Those are all approaches that we need to embark on in this crisis.

I come to days at sea. I fought alongside my hon. Friend the Minister—I was his bag carrier, for which he gave me the valiant service medal, but not the job as his parliamentary private secretary that I was looking for—when the Conservative Government proposed the days at sea limitation. The NFFO is still strongly and strenuously opposed. In fact, it destroyed days at sea with its appeal to Europe.

Days at sea limits, or time limits on fishing, still have a problem of intellectual consistency, although that is par for the course on this side of the House: having opposed it, can we now accept it? I am coming round to the view that, because we would limit the time spent fishing, which is crucial, we could consider it on two grounds. First, the benefit of being closer to the stocks than competitors, if we receive it, is substantial; secondly, the lying-up periods, tying-up periods and non-fishing periods are financed by Europe or the Government—they have to be. The industry is teetering on the verge of bankruptcy in many cases, and it is unreasonable to force it to accept a limit on effort without financial compensation.

My hon. Friend the Member for Scarborough and Whitby (Lawrie Quinn) made a point about discards. When we saw the Commission's director of conservation—if I had that title, I would commit suicide—he told us that the Norwegian system of requiring all discards to be taken back to port is not working, but there is a case for it that we should consider. If all discards had to be brought in to be used for fish-meal or to be sold for whatever purposes, provided that the minimum landing rules are changed, we would know exactly what was going on, and we certainly need to.

That point brings me back to where I started. My hon. Friend the Minister will fight for the British fishing industry—I have every confidence in his doing so—and Labour Members are not here to negotiate the death of the British fishing industry. The World Wildlife Fund has produced an important set of proposals on what it calls investment in fishing, and it is quite right. How do we finance a fishing industry from here, where it is going to contract and there has to be decommissioning? Those matters should be handled fairly between Scotland and England, not by the Minister being left to scratch round in DEFRA's back pocket for whatever money is left over to match the £25 million provided in Scotland.

We must help to finance that managed decline and curtailment of effort to the point at which we get sustainable stocks and sustainable fishing, which will be the reward for the conservation measures that we are being asked to accept. We will accept them, if there is a future for fishing and if the Government or the Community—I am not bothered which—invest in the industry.

There must be investment in fishing so that it can come through from where we are now—the prelude to further decline—to the point we shall reach if and when those conservation measures work.

4.13 pm

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): I was watching television this morning and I saw the harrowing pictures from Galicia of the oil spill and the resulting damage to the environment, wildlife and fishing communities. Perhaps it has been caused by human greed in terms of single-hull tankers, but it is a tragedy none the less—an environmental and natural disaster.

I thought to myself how much more of a tragedy it would be if fishing communities here had visited on them an unnecessary disaster, not one resulting from an accident or from the environment. The more I consider the issue, the more convinced I am that any panic measure taken by the European Commission this December would be unnecessary and wrong. It would visit extreme suffering on many communities in pursuit of a totally unworkable policy and conditions not borne out by the science.

A few days ago, the Minister accused me of attacking the science—I wish he had not—as if the science were read. I was not attacking the science; I was attacking the conclusions drawn by the International Council for the Exploration of the Sea from the scientific research that we have in front of us. The Minister himself, as has been pointed out twice in the debate, reserves himself the right, correctly in my view, to question the ICES recommendation that 1 million tonnes of industrial fish can be swept out of the North sea, including 50,000 tonnes of human consumption by-catch, while a human consumption fishery is closed down. He questions ICES on that matter, so the rest of us are entitled to consider the ICES report and the reality of what is in the science rather than the panicky pronouncements and manipulations that we see in so many of the comments from Commissioner Fischler and elsewhere.

The reality is that the figures show that the haddock spawning biomass, which, as the Minister knows, is by far the most important thing, is the highest since 1971. The spawning stock biomass for saithe is the highest since 1976, the whiting spawning stock is the largest since 1991 and everyone knows that prawn stocks are extremely robust. All that is in the figures.

Cod stocks are extremely low and extremely vulnerable, but even cod stocks have increased by 27 per cent. on the estimates in the figures compared with last year's total. Furthermore, all the figures that I have read out to the House—*[Interruption.]* The Minister looks at his officials, but I have the figures here and I can easily read them out. He does not need his officials when I am here. If he so wishes, I can read out the spawning stock biomass figures; believe me, they are correct.

The figures—the estimates—that I have read out refer to the largest spawning stock biomass for a range of white fisheries and, even from a very low level, there is a recovery in the cod stock biomass. However, all those estimates take account of the same effort this year as last. That is the underlying assumption in the scientific advice, but we all know that there was not the same effort last year as this. Why not? Because 20 per cent. of the Scottish fleet is no more—it has been decommissioned. The Scottish fleet is also now fishing with 110 mm nets with square mesh panels.

Incidentally, the £25 million package already referred to was for not just the decommissioning scheme, but £1 million went to research involving scientists and fishermen. We have the results, which show the escape of marketable haddock from 110 mm nets as 50 per cent. and that of marketable whiting as 70 per cent. We know that, as a direct result, the whiting and haddock quota will not be fished this year, not because there are no haddock and whiting in the sea, as they are there aplenty, but because there are very few discards of those marketable fish in the Scottish sector of the North sea as a result of the technical measures introduced by the Scottish fleet.

My good friend the hon. Member for Scarborough and Whitby (Lawrie Quinn) made some interesting remarks. I am tempted to say that he said he wants to join us, although he was not making a territorial demand. That is my understanding, but he should remember, of course, that if he did so his fleet would be fishing with 110 mm nets with square mesh panels, as opposed to those in waters south of Newcastle where, remarkably, there are small cod and people are fishing with 80 mm nets. [HON. MEMBERS: "120 mm."] In Norwegian waters, 120 mm nets are used, but 80 mm fishing is allowed, as the Minister well knows, south of Newcastle. The reality is that serious conservation measures have already been taken—conservation measures that he and I have argued for over many years. However, somehow and fantastically, they have not been included in the scientific assessment presented to us as the solution when stocks, or at least the biomass, are expanding. Somehow, the solution is to close the fishery. That is an unbelievable and lunatic recommendation from the European Commission and any serious analysis of the science would come to exactly the same conclusion.

Why is that important? It is important because no one will be to blame if we allow people to say, "It is a shame about our fishing communities—a great tragedy—but there are no fish in the sea." We could all blame each other for the various stances that we have taken in politics over the past 20 years: people might blame the fishermen and the processors, the fishermen might blame the processors, the east coast might blame the west, Scotland might blame England and everybody might blame Spain. None the less, nobody would be essentially to blame because nothing can be done.

The right hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes), who is one of the few Members who is more loyal now than when he was a member of the Government, illustrated that point by saying, "Nothing can be done. What hope is there?" Read the figures: the reality is that plenty can be done. If it is not done, the people who live around the coastline of Scotland and elsewhere will want to know why.

Mr. Michael Connarty (Falkirk, East): I am very interested in the points that the hon. Gentleman has made and I hope that he makes his information available or tells us where it is available. Is there not a contradiction? The Scottish Fishermen's Federation says that

> "there is a tendency to 'high grading' (landing only the most valuable fish) in cod and associated fisheries . . . This will lead to excessive discarding and will increase mortality beyond the levels foreseen by the TAC."

However, the hon. Gentleman seems to be saying that that is not happening in Scotland. Why has the SFF alerted us to this fact in its own brief?

Mr. Salmond: What is happening in Scotland is this: because of the move to a large mesh and square-mesh panel, there are huge escapes of haddock and whiting. Haddock and whiting are smaller than cod and are no longer under pressure, but in any event using a high mesh—110 mm in Scottish waters, or 120 in regional waters—will mean a much more environmentally satisfactory fishery.

The Scottish fleet's transfer to the higher mesh has caused it some grief because the higher mesh allows many fish to escape, but that sacrifice—that conservation measure—was not taken into account in the Commission's calculation. There is no argument: according to the ICES advice, there was no time for assessment of the impact of the measures taken.

Mr. Doran: There is concern about the way in which these measures are being used out at sea. It is simple enough to get around technical measures that have been quite properly implemented in Scotland. A fisherman told me recently that square mesh panels are at the top of nets because fish swim upwards, and that if the net is turned the other way up they cannot get out. I do not know whether the allegations are true, but when suspicions and problems are floating around in the industry even more caution is needed.

Mr. Salmond: If the technical measures were not working, there would not have been the 50 per cent. escape of haddock reported by the joint scientific body. Moreover, this year's haddock quota would have been fished. If the hon. Gentleman had spoken to fishermen, he would know that there is any amount of young haddock in the North sea. ICES confirms that. The quota has not been taken because the technical measures are working, and the same applies to whiting. There is no longer a threat to those species. The hon. Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell), sitting directly behind the hon. Gentleman, is nodding vigorously. The hon. Gentleman should probably consult the chairman of the all-party fisheries committee before making any more hostile interventions.

Let me now say something with which all will agree. For the first time, the Scottish Executive have this year published a full analysis of the impact of fishing as an industry on the Scottish coastline. I use the word "industry" deliberately. It is not just a question of the catchers or the processors, many of whom are my constituents and those of the hon. Member for Aberdeen, Central (Mr. Doran); it is a question of the whole infrastructure that the industry supports. I am thinking of all the industries associated with a fishing community—netmakers, ropemakers, joiners, electricians and harbour staff. The research tells us that not 20,000 or 25,000—as has been suggested in the past—but 40,000 people owe their employment to the Scottish fishing industry, directly or indirectly.

Angus Robertson (Moray): Will my hon. Friend confirm that those statistics show that Moray's fishing communities figure largely? A representative of the processing sector in Buckie wrote to me this morning saying:

"For prawns, all the land based jobs are completely reliant on our Scottish fishery . . . and there are no other feasible import supplies available; thus the processing industry would collapse."

That is indeed a dire warning. Does my hon. Friend agree that we need more than just assurances from the Government—that we need delivery to prevent any such collapse?

Mr. Salmond: My hon. Friend is right about the Moray fishing communities, which feature heavily on the list, as do my constituents and those of the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Carmichael). As might be expected, those areas depend heavily on fishing.

Perhaps the most surprising feature of the Scottish Executive's statistics is the information that while Fraserburgh is the most fishing-dependent community in Europe—55 per cent. of employment there depends on fishing—the second most dependent travel-to-work area is Annan, in the south-west of Scotland. The figures relate to the whole coastline of Scotland. Even Motherwell contains many fishing-dependent jobs. It should be understood that this is not just a matter for the north-east or for Shetland, but for the whole coastline and, indeed, for Yorkshire and parts of Northern Ireland. In many communities the concentration of fishing jobs is enormous. That is why we are desperate to convey the message that the industry should at last be treated as a political priority. It has never been treated in that way before, by Tory or by Labour Governments.

Some of today's debate has been quite jocular. The Minister and I have known each other for a long time, and many Members here are veterans of fishing debates. The consequences of what we are discussing, however, go far beyond any badinage exchanged across the Chamber. The Minister speculated on the existence of a conspiracy theory in which fishermen and fishing communities believed. It is not necessary to have a crystal ball to find a conspiracy theory; it is necessary only to look at the background—at minutes and Scottish Office correspondence released last year under the 30-year rule. According to a Scottish Office paper,

"In a wider UK context of European policy, they"—

the Scottish fishermen—

"must be regarded as expendable."

The hon. Member for Great Grimsby looks surprised, but that applied to negotiations that took place when Edward Heath was Tory Prime Minister.

The same pattern of fishing interests being traded away has been repeated time and again over the past 30 years. However, I disagree with Members who say that it is all to do with the CFP, or to do with not being part of the CFP, or to do with national control or with zonal control. I think the underlying issue relates to the extent to which fishing is seen as a priority. Spain, within the CFP, regards fishing as a priority. If the fishermen are in trouble, they will hold up the European Council until hell freezes over, or engage in a variety of other techniques to save the fishermen. It is the same as what President Chirac does for his farmers. Norway, outside the CFP, makes fishing a major priority and negotiates, year after year, a firm deal with the other fishing

[Mr. Salmond]

countries. I think that what really matters is the underlying question of the extent to which fishing is seen as a priority.

Such political arguments will not be the stuff of the next few weeks and months, which will prove vital for our fishing communities. I will not have an independent Scotland in the next few months. The Conservative party will not be able to withdraw from the CFP or from Europe over the next few months. The Liberals will not be able to have zonal management over the next few months. All we can do over the next few weeks and months is to ensure that the major part of our industry in Scotland will be allowed to survive.

We point out in our amendment that many of the changes proposed for the CFP are quite positive, but academic. They will be entirely academic if there is no industry to benefit from them. That is why we must have from the Minister not just the indications he gave at the outset, but two absolute assurances. First, we need an assurance that fishing will not be traded away yet again in European negotiations, as it has been progressively over the last 30 years. Secondly, we need an assurance that the Prime Minister—who is not engaged mentally at present, given the reply that he gave to the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland yesterday—will start to become engaged in this topic, as President Chirac would be engaged if French fishermen were currently under the cosh.

It is simply not acceptable to the Scottish fishing industry for the Prime Minster to be banging the phones for George W. Bush and concentrating on the international situation, rather than banging the phones for the fishing industry in its hour of need. We want to hear from the fisheries Minister that at last, at this moment of total crisis, the fishing industry will be given the priority it deserves, and that every level of Government, including the Prime Minister, will ensure that a viable future is negotiated for our fishing communities, rather than another sell-out.

4.29 pm

Mr. Alan Campbell (Tynemouth): It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond), and I certainly do not regard the jobs of fishermen in my constituency, or elsewhere, as expendable. Although there has been some light-hearted banter in the Chamber, this is a serious matter—indeed a critical one for people in our constituencies. We are talking not about fishing communities and glory days of the past—I, too, am a student of history, and I listened with interest to the comments from those on the Opposition Benches—but about the livelihoods of hundreds of people who go to sea or work onshore in our constituencies. That is why I welcome the Minister's inviting us to discuss these matters with him soon, and to access scientific advice. He will know that we are in regular contact with fishermen in our constituencies. They are a source of information, and we take that very seriously. We seek to give voice to their concerns in the Chamber, and that is what I intend to do.

In turn, of course, the Minister is our strong voice in Europe, and he is widely acknowledged as offering a strong voice for the UK fishing industry, including the area of North Shields, which I represent. If the hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr. Hayes) had ventured north of Hartlepool, the fishermen of North Shields would doubtless have told him that. However, the Minister will have to draw on all his strength and experience, because one gets the feeling that this is a critical period. A little over a year ago, we were debating in this Chamber the effect on cod fishing of the closure of areas of the North sea. What appeared then to be extremely draconian measures were accepted, albeit reluctantly, as necessary. Twelve months on, we are now told that matters are worse than that, and that in effect we are faced with the closure of the cod fishery. Even if that proves to be 80 per cent. true, rather than 100 per cent., for many people that will amount to much the same thing. I should point out that the fishermen in my constituency do not rely exclusively on cod for a living. Nevertheless, they tell me that they oppose, and worry about the effects of, a closure, which they consider a step too far.

Perhaps naively, I considered last year's cod recovery programme as an unprecedented coming together of scientific advice and the experiences of fishermen, and I hoped that that would continue. It was a shock to many fishermen—and indeed to me—to find that that position is now diverging. Scientists are taking a much more radical position that is increasingly at variance with the views and the experience of many fishermen. In view of that divergence and the sense of near-crisis in the industry, we need cool heads. We need a rational assessment—as far as is possible—of the reality of the existing situation, and we need to ensure that we work through each of the available options.

The fishermen whom I represent are concerned. They wonder why the cod recovery programme has so far not been allowed to take effect, and whether the evidence has been properly evaluated. They tell me that some of the evidence on which recent pronouncements were made may actually date from two years ago—before the measures that we debated were put in place. Of course, since then areas of the North sea have closed. I am told that cod catches are down by about 50 per cent. Some 170 boats from the UK fishing fleet, and 70 boats from the Danish fleet, have been decommissioned. We await the assessment of the impact of changes in mesh sizes, and the lessons learned from the Irish sea cod recovery programme.

My understanding was that the plan was never intended to be a short-term fix. People talked about a period of four to five years, and many of the fishermen that I have talked to think that the plan needs to be in place for a decade.

Mr. Roy Beggs (East Antrim): Can the hon. Gentleman tell us how many Spanish fishing vessels have been decommissioned?

Mr. Campbell: I am unable to give the hon. Gentleman that information, but I do know that my fishermen are not concerned about the Spanish accessing their area of the North sea. They are not worried greatly by that, because it does not happen often.

Much was made in the previous speech about the cod spawning stock biomass, but fishermen tell me that evidence exists to suggest that it is in fact increasing.

That is not to say that there is no problem, or that it is not at a very dangerous level. I am certainly not arguing that we should not take the scientific advice seriously. The fishermen whom I talk to are not saying that either, but what they do want is to ensure that we raise important questions before we take action that we may come to regret.

We should appreciate that the science involved is an inexact one, and it deserves to be challenged. That also allows us to take a perhaps longer-term view. I do not want to appear flippant, but if we are told that lawns are going to disappear from English gardens in the next few decades, who is to say that cod will not disappear from the North sea because of environmental and climate change? It would be a sad irony indeed if we were to adopt these draconian measures, and if fishermen were to go out of business, only for cod stocks to fail to recover in the North sea.

I said that fishermen in North Shields do not rely on cod for their livelihoods, but that does not mean that this issue does not matter to them. They rely heavily on prawns, and the provisional figures suggest that the news on that front is acceptable. Even if the changes do not amount to wholesale closure, any change in the cod regime in the North sea will affect the prawn fisheries that my fishermen rely on. It will exacerbate an existing trend—the divergence of effort towards the prawn fisheries. I listened to the comments suggesting that all seemed to be well with the prawn fisheries, and I hope that that is so, but I am told that the season started late this year, and that the prawns are smaller than might have been expected. I emphasise the point that the prawn fishery is not a bottomless pit. I trust my hon. Friend the Minister to ensure that he does everything that he can to protect that fishery.

Various options have been suggested, including limiting effort. Let us not go down the route—either now or during the wider reform of policy—of a one-size-fits-all situation. We need to look at what works, and where it works. If we adopt a tie-up scheme or a decommissioning scheme for people who have had enough and want to leave the industry—I make this point as much for the Treasury's benefit as for the Minister's—the Treasury will eventually have to face up to the resulting cost. Either it will have to give moneys directly to the fishing industry, or pick up the cost afterwards.

These are extremely difficult circumstances. None of the available options will be pointless, and none will come cheap, but we should consider them fully before taking a step too far.

4.38 pm

Mr. Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland): I understand through the usual channels that if we all speak for five minutes, we might all be allowed to speak, so I shall try to limit my remarks. I agreed with a great deal of what the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) said, so I shall try not to go over the same ground.

It is almost a cliché to say that there is a crisis in the Scottish fishing industry and the white fish fleet in particular. However, it is difficult to overstate the severe difficulties that it faces, as we have heard today. In the past 12 months, some 150 vessels have been removed from the Scottish white fish fleet through decommissioning, losses and sinking, transfers to the pelagic sector, and sales outwith the United Kingdom. This is the second year of the cod recovery plan, and, as others have said, the target of 30 per cent. year-on-year improvement in cod stocks was very nearly met last year when, according to ICES figures, there was a 27 per cent. improvement in the spawning stock biomass for cod.

I do not wish to dwell on what was said by Conservative Members, but I have to say that I take issue with the hon. Member for Congleton (Ann Winterton). She suggested that those of us who promote reform of the common fisheries policy do so because we are prepared to be European before defending our industry. That is a misrepresentation of the situation.

Ann Winterton: That is not what I said.

Mr. Carmichael: The hon. Lady says that that is not what she said. I accept that, but it is what I understood her to say. In the previous two renegotiations of the CFP, which happened under a Conservative Government, we said that the policy would not work. History shows us to have been correct, and we are saying the same again now. Our belief about what is best for the fishing industry is shared by the Scottish Fishermen's Federation, the Shetland Fishermen's Association, Shetland Oceans Alliance and the Orkney Fisheries Association.

I welcome the Minister's assurances that proper account will be taken of the experience with the larger mesh sizes, the square mesh panels and the painful decommissioning that we have gone through in Scotland. I merely observe that the fact that it has taken until now to get to the point at which the Minister says that he will take the matter to the European Commission tells us something about the process in which we are engaged. Surely any process that is truly scientific and objective would look for information, so why do we have to drag the Commission, kicking and screaming, to see the benefits of what we have done.

I was in Brussels last week. I spoke to John Farnell who, unless I am more out of touch with Scottish politics than I thought, is not the Scottish fishing Minister. I also spoke to other EU officials. They were not encouraging. The Minister is not going to find it easy. I wish him well: there has been talk about the fire in the Minister's belly, but I hope that it is well stoked up when he argues the case for the Scottish industry. I shall give him a bottle of Highland Park whisky if he can pull it off.

The right hon. Member for Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley (Mr. Foulkes) spoke about the need for hon. Members to argue for conservation in their constituencies. It is a pity that he is not in his place, as I regard that attitude as misguided and patronising. Fishermen in my constituency are well aware of the need for conservation. Their livelihoods, and the livelihoods of some 30 per cent. of the population of Shetland, depend on having fish stocks. That is what is at stake for us.

My hon. Friend the Member for St. Ives (Andrew George) spoke about the need for rollover. There is some merit in that argument, but monitoring will present a difficulty. Again, I return to the need to get scientists out of their offices and off their research vessels, and onto commercial fishing vessels. That is where they will see the reality of the situation.

[Mr. Carmichael]

Much has been said about industrial fishing, but time does not permit me to do more than add my weight to what the Minister said. The hon. Member for Banff and Buchan said that the important thing was not whether the CFP should be reformed or abolished, but the passion and significance that we attach to the fishing industry. The future viability of the whole community in Shetland depends on the Minister getting it right next month. For that reason, I want him to display passion and vigour in the negotiations, and in that way save our white fish fleet.

4.44 pm

Mr. Bob Blizzard (Waveney): I have attended nearly all the fisheries debates since I came to the House, as Lowestoft has always been an important fishing port. Records show that, until recently, about 10 per cent. of the fish landed in England was landed at Lowestoft. However, if things carry on as they are it will not be long before I shall have no special reason to come to these debates.

A year ago, there were nine beam trawlers in Lowestoft, and an inshore fleet of about 40 vessels. That was a historic low, yet in August this year the beam trawler company, Colne Shipping, ceased fishing. All we have now is about 18 inshore vessels. The end of Colne's was the end of generations of fishing in Lowestoft, and we have no more deep-sea trawling any more. The subject is very emotive, and last August was a very depressing month in Lowestoft's history.

Sad to say, it has taken the end of Colne's to make us all recognise what has happened. I fear that, even now, hon. Members still do not accept what is happening. Representatives of Colne's told me when the news was announced that they could not make fishing pay any more. They said that that was because they could not catch even the fish to which they had quota entitlement. Prices were poor, and the fuel costs incurred from vessels having to go to the Norwegian sector to try to catch the fish were too high.

The company was supported by the Government. In February, my hon. Friend the Minister authorised a payment of £650,000 for the decommissioning of two vessels. That huge sum was more than any company in my constituency has ever received. The Government were right to award that money in a bid to support the company through a difficult time, but the money lasted only six months. That shows how costly it is to try to buy our way out of the problem.

Was that good value for the taxpayer? The question is unavoidable. I supported the decommissioning award made to Colne's, and urged my hon. Friend the Minister to grant it. However, will the taxpayer consider paying £650,000 for six months to be a good deal?

I have referred to the Lowestoft example as a way of showing that the CFP has failed. We all know that. It has certainly failed Lowestoft. All the meetings, debates and activity in Europe have left us without deep-sea fishing, and with only a small remnant of our inshore fleet. However, that means that reality has now taken a grip. People in Lowestoft remember being able to walk across the harbour by means of the fishing boats all docked side by side, but that was the problem: all those boats plundered too many fish for too long.

The story of the CFP is simple. Every year in this debate, the scientific figures are produced to show that quotas must be cut. Understandably, fishermen claim that they will lose their jobs and politicians like me argue on behalf of their fishermen, but what happens? Each year, the issue is fudged. Each year, we get compromises, and then we pay the price.

That is happening again this afternoon. People have claimed that that there is something wrong with the scientific advice and that we should just ease off a bit. I can understand that, but the lessons are clear. What has been remarkable in Lowestoft this year is what the fishermen have said to me. Inshore fishermen have told me that the scientists were "right, horribly right". The representatives of Colne's told me, when the news was announced that the company would have to end its fishing interests, that we should have taken notice of the scientists all along, and that the problem started more than 30 years ago, before we ever got involved in the common fisheries policy.

The lesson that fishermen in Lowestoft have learned is to stick to the science. I think that our Government try harder to do that than those of many other member states. We know the desperate state of the stocks; we can argue that this year some year classes are a little better than the previous one, but it is all way below the safe biological limits. Whatever figures the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) has, the scientists know that they are all below the safe biological limits. One year can be a bit better than the other but we are still in deep trouble.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. Blizzard: I will not give way.

The first year that I was elected, fishermen told me that there were more plaice than the scientists thought. I went to see my hon. Friend the Minister, who sent the scientists out again. They came back saying that that was right and we increased the plaice quota. I wonder now whether that was a good thing to do—it was at the time, but now the plaice are in a diabolical state.

If we want to conserve fish, we will have to take draconian measures for a long time, possibly for five years. Scientists tell me that the fleet will probably have to be reduced by half. On the other hand, we could give up altogether and just let the fishermen fish it out—that might be no worse than what we are doing because what we are doing is not very successful.

Whatever we do, how do the fishermen survive? Will there be an industry left to catch anything once we have taken those draconian measures, assuming, of course, that there will not be an environmental problem that prevents recovery? It is very difficult. I have told the House how much it cost to keep the Lowestoft trawler fleet alive. I asked an inshore fisherman how much money he would need to help him because he cannot catch cod. He said £500 a month. That is not a lot but it adds up to £6,000 a year and £30,000 over five years for one fisherman on one boat. If we multiply that by 18 fishermen in Lowestoft, it comes to a lot of money to keep them going. I can understand people wanting financial support—I would like them to have it. However, we are talking about a lot of money and we would simply be tying up the same number of fishermen

who will go out and catch the fish when it is all over. I think that decommissioning makes more sense than tying up. *[Interruption.]* I realise that I have been talking for six minutes, as I am reminded from a sedentary position, but there have been grosser abuses of parliamentary time this afternoon.

We have been through a difficult period but, as I said earlier, I do not think that it has been caused by fishermen who carry out long-lining, which is a method of catching fish. Will my hon. Friend exempt the long-liners from whatever restrictions are imposed regarding cod, as I do not think that they devastate the stocks?

We have been through this devastation before, 30 years ago when the herring disappeared and now they are back in our waters. Fishermen can catch herring, but they cannot get much for them—they tell me they get £20 for 10 stone. Could someone from the Department work with my local authority, using money from fisheries regeneration, to see whether we can do something about marketing herring? People in this country have forgotten about herring for generations. If we could get a price for herring, there would be a future for some of the fishermen.

The common fisheries policy has failed and we are trying to reform it. The new policy looks very familiar because no one could think of anything very different to do. The biggest flaw is enforcement. There has always been cheating, if that is what we call it. As the quotas have become tighter and things have got more difficult for the fishermen, so the cheating has increased. Probably only half the amount of fish landed is recorded. In some European countries there are other layers as well. We have all been to places and seen the small fish; we have all seen evidence of illegal nets. The cheating in some other countries is worse than it is here, but I am told that we have started to catch up. Unless there is enforcement, there is no point in having a policy. Ministers such as ours can sit up all night at the meeting in December, but if the rules are broken nobody is better off. If we cannot enforce them, we might as well give up.

The fish know no boundaries, and we must have a common approach. I do not have a great deal of faith that the approach will work but I wish my hon. Friend the Minister all the best for what will inevitably be an all-night session in December. We could not have a better representative, and I think that other Front Bench spokesmen are probably relieved that he is going and they are not.

4.54 pm

Mr. Peter Duncan (Galloway and Upper Nithsdale): Given the time that was available, it is regrettable that Opposition Members who represent substantial fishing communities have been restricted to three or four-minute speeches at the end of the debate. I want to make a few observations on some issues that relate to my constituency, which covers fishing communities in Kirkcudbright, Newton Stewart and the Machars. Indeed, some of my constituents have paid the ultimate price within the past couple of years in the pursuit of a commodity that some of us take for granted.

I am concerned about the complacency that has been shown in this debate. The industry, especially in Scotland, takes sustainability immensely seriously. When one speaks to some of those business men—for that is indeed what they are—one finds that they are part of family businesses that have been established for many generations. Could any commercial entity have a greater concern about the sustainability of fish stocks than those family businesses? I come from one myself so I am well aware that sustainability means preparing for future generations.

I am only too well aware that such family businesses have played their part during the past year. The decommissioning scheme was more than 100 per cent. oversubscribed in Scotland. A £25 million fund was available, but £50 million could have been paid out. There were 215 applications—a third of the fleet wanted to leave the industry. Those people have played their part.

When I spoke to fishermen this week, they expressed frustration that no cognisance was being taken in the current review of what they had already delivered. The hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) mentioned increased mesh sizes. No cognisance was taken of that; nor of the introduction of "windows" for the release of small stock. There can be no frustration greater than that of fishermen who know that there are problems and are doing what they can to address sustainability, while the Commission seems to take no account of what they are doing.

The key point is that fishermen want to be involved in the process. They want to know what is going on, yet they feel excluded. Why has the two-volume report been available for two weeks, but has apparently not yet been provided to the Commission? Why are fishermen excluded from the negotiations? I can see no reason why fishermen's representatives could not attend as part of the delegations. That would do much to reassure fishing communities, which have sustainability at heart, that there is nothing to hide.

I suspect that there is something to hide, however. For example, on the west coast of Scotland the historic deep-sea fishing grounds have been carved up in a backroom deal in which Scotland accounts for only 2 per cent. of the available catch, while 80 per cent. goes to Spain and the rest is carved up between Ireland and France—*[Interruption.]* I accept the Minister's correction: 80 per cent. goes to France and the rest is split between Ireland and Spain. It was a political stitch-up. The ultimate sting in the tail is that the Scottish Fisheries Protection Agency is expected to police that dirty deed.

4.57 pm

Mr. Russell Brown (Dumfries): I begin by informing the House that I made the Speaker's office aware of the fact that I would arrive late for the debate.

I appreciate that many hon. Members have spoken about the fishing fleets that operate out of their constituencies. The hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) mentioned Annan, which is my home town. It no longer has a fishing fleet; its fishermen fish out of Kirkcudbright.

Two major employers in Annan, however, are fish-processing businesses, and during the past couple of days I have spoken to management at both factories. On the surface, it seems that there will be little impact on those businesses. Both developed from cottage industries over many years. One started out producing smoked salmon and the company has now expanded to

[Mr. Russell Brown]

give regular employment to between 700 to 800 people. At this time of year, the number increases to between 1,100 and 1,200 to cope with seasonal work for the Christmas and new year period.

The company uses very little white fish and I was assured that the current proposals would have no impact on their business. The only thing that might happen would be a small rescheduling of certain processes and the introduction of alternative product lines.

The other company, which was known in the town for many years as nothing more than "the shrimp factory", is now run by Young's Bluecrest, whose main product is breaded scampi. Clearly, it has serious concerns because although it has been stated that stocks of nephrops are perfectly healthy, if the Council of Ministers decides fully to implement the scientific recommendations of ICES without heeding any other arguments about nephrops, the business could close down. The issue at stake here is by-catch, the problem identified by my hon. Friend the Member for Scarborough and Whitby (Lawrie Quinn) and my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Redcar (Vera Baird).

My point to the Minister is that he has an important job to do, as others have said. It is important to take heed of much of what the scientists are saying in the ICES recommendations, but it is important also that scientists do not overstep the mark with certain elements of the recommendations. I hope that my hon. Friend will, as hon. Members from all parties have requested this afternoon, put up a fight for our UK fishing fleets.

5.1 pm

Mr. Alan Reid (Argyll and Bute): It is clear that if the Commission's recommendations were implemented, they would have a devastating effect not only on our fishing communities but on communities throughout the country that rely on fishing-related industries such as processing. However, the main impact will be felt by fishing communities, many of which are by their very nature isolated, so other sources of employment are hard to find.

Let us be clear: even with the Commission's latest proposal for an 80 per cent. cut, the recommendations would still lead to the complete shutdown of the work of many fishing communities, and that shutdown would be permanent. The vessels, skills and infrastructure would all disappear, so even if the industry were allowed to resume fishing in 10 or 12 years, there would be nothing in place to allow it to reopen. If the Commission's proposals are accepted, the results will be permanent. That is how important it is that the Government argue vociferously for Britain in negotiations.

This is not only a case of arguing vociferously, however. The Minister has been advised to adopt the tactics of the Deputy Prime Minister, but it is no good arguing and then losing the qualified majority vote; deals have to be done. I agree with what the hon. Member for Galloway and Upper Nithsdale (Mr. Duncan) said about deep-sea trawling off the west of Scotland earlier this year. The Scottish Fishermen's Federation supported the scientific advice, but in the secrecy of the Council of Ministers meeting a deal was done and Britain lost. This time we want the Government to negotiate seriously, and to succeed.

Much has been said about the scientific evidence, and I echo what the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) said. The ICES figures show an increase of well over 20 per cent. in cod stocks this year compared with last year, and that, with the technical measures and the decommissioning that has taken place, indicates that the cod recovery plan is working. We should give it time to see whether it will work, rather than taking draconian measures now.

The proposed measures for nephrops are particularly ridiculous. I have written answers from the Minister saying that his officials agree that the cod by-catch from nephrops is insignificant. The fact that the Commission's recommendations are in complete disagreement with British scientists shows how discredited they are.

5.4 pm

Sir Robert Smith (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine): I want to reinforce the message that the industry will die if fisheries are closed, and even at 80 per cent., the industry has no future. That is why it is crucial that the right decisions are made this time.

The hon. Member for Waveney (Mr. Blizzard) expressed worry about some of the figures. However, the figures for haddock come from the scientists' research, and the stock-spawning biomass has not been as high since 1971, so this is not just a minor blip; there is a reasonable stock-spawning biomass for haddock. The problem for the industry is that media coverage concentrates on cod, but that represents only between 10 and 12 per cent. of the business, and to close down the whole business for the sake of between 10 and 12 per cent. seems a draconian and risky measure.

It would far more effective to take the research on board. After all, the Scottish Executive did not spend £1 million for nothing. To have all that research available but not to use it at this crucial time would be a ridiculous waste of that investment, so the research must inform the debate, which is about getting the balance of risk right and recognising the fishing industry's valuable role in the community.

I welcome the Minister's commitment to consider what happens in the Norway negotiations. The fishermen certainly find that the Norwegian side seem to have far more direct input into those negotiations. Resolving that issue is crucial to building up good will.

I want to reinforce the crucial message about European negotiations that has come from this debate. The Prime Minister may have been briefed, but he did not show that when he answered a question yesterday. However, having been briefed, he must understand the complexity of the situation. With qualified majority voting, we need him to say, in quiet negotiations at the highest levels, that the proposals on the table cannot make progress unless people recognise that although the whole United Kingdom does not depend on what happens in those negotiations, vital communities within the United Kingdom do. In particular, the north-east of Scotland is highly dependent on the fishing industry, and a positive outcome is required.

5.6 pm

Mr. Hayes: With the leave of the House, Madam Deputy Speaker, I wish to respond to the debate. I shall be brief because this has been a long debate and I want to give the Minister time to sum it up.

I shall start by picking up the point about consensus made by the hon. Member for St. Ives (Andrew George). The genuine concern on both sides of the House has been reflected in many contributions from hon. Members of all political persuasions during this important and well argued debate, which has taken place in an appropriate, serious spirit that has reflected the genuine concerns in the affected communities. The hon. Gentleman was right to say that we must co-operate in defence of those communities to every possible degree.

I wish to emphasise the point that was made by the hon. Members for Argyll and Bute (Mr. Reid), for Aberdeen, Central (Mr. Doran), for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) and various others—that those communities are rooted in the fishing industry. The hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) gave the figures for the employment dependence throughout Scotland. I, too mentioned those figures in my earlier contribution, and they are shocking. One begins to realise that those communities will be truly devastated if the scale of reductions envisaged in the proposals is put in place. I hope that every Member is moved by that realisation, and it should inspire them to the sort of action called for by a variety of people

Several hon. Members, including my hon. Friend the Member for Galloway and Upper Nithsdale (Mr. Duncan) and the hon. Members for Banff and Buchan and for Great Grimsby, made points about the science. They questioned not the scientists' intent, but whether the whole scientific picture had been laid before us.

We should consider the latest information that has become available as a result of the changes that have taken place. We should consider not simply the technological changes referred to by the hon. Member for Great Grimsby, but the changes in the size of the fleet. People cannot project with any accuracy and assess the proposal's likely impact unless that projection is measured against the current state of the industry—a criticism that has been made time and again. Hon. Members on both sides of the House have made the point that we do not distrust scientists per se, but we want the science to be holistic, comprehensive and balanced.

The hon. Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine (Sir Robert Smith) said that even with 80 per cent. left, the industry would not be viable. He is right to emphasise that, because a partial restriction will not lower the mortgages or the cost of living of those fishing families, nor it will lower the fishing industry's fixed costs. The insurance costs and other permanent costs are not affected by the fact that the fishermen will not go to sea for two or three days a week, or whatever the compromise happens to be. The hon. Gentleman made an important point about the real impact of these changes, even if the Commission has suggested some sort of compromise.

I have no doubts about the Minister's integrity or his knowledge of these matters. I said that at the beginning of the debate, and it has been reflected in the spirit of the debate, and in comments from Members on both sides of the House. As my hon. Friend the Member for Congleton (Ann Winterton) said, however, this is now a political matter, and it is recognised as such by the fishing industry as well as by politicians. It is political because it is about trading. It will involve trading, dealing, negotiations and all the other things that happen when such matters come before European Ministers. I do not doubt the integrity of our Minister, but I doubt his power to do anything about that.

Unless the matter is dealt with at the very highest level of Government, and the Prime Minister takes a personal and genuine interest and gives fishing the priority—several hon. Members used that word—that many of us believe it deserves, it will be traded away as if it were nothing. I am not prepared to let that happen without a fight, and without speaking very loudly about it in this Chamber and elsewhere. That is the challenge to the Minister. He knows that I believe that the only way forward is to leave the common fisheries policy. I will say that time and again. Given that that will not happen while the current crisis is being resolved, we legitimately demand—not on our behalf but on behalf of those hard-pressed fishermen, their families and their communities—that he fight for them with every sinew in his body, and that his boss, the Prime Minister, show legitimate concern and real passion in fighting for them, too.

5.11 pm

Mr. Morley: With the leave of the House, Madam Deputy Speaker, I shall wind up the debate.

We have heard speeches from the hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr. Hayes), my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, Central (Mr. Doran), the hon. Member for St. Ives (Andrew George), my hon. Friend the Member for Scarborough and Whitby (Lawrie Quinn), the hon. Member for Congleton (Ann Winterton), my hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell), the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond), my hon. Friend the Member for Tynemouth (Mr. Campbell), the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Carmichael), my hon. Friend the Member for Waveney (Mr. Blizzard), the hon. Member for Galloway and Upper Nithsdale (Mr. Duncan), my hon. Friend the Member for Dumfries (Mr. Brown), the hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Mr. Reid), and the hon. Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine (Sir Robert Smith). That demonstrates the concern of many Members about the Commission's proposals on fishing. These debates are serious, because Members participate on the basis of their knowledge, and of representing their constituencies and the fishing industry. I very much respect that.

Looking for some of the solutions will be difficult. We should be clear that the Commission is deadly serious. There were one or two comments about scares; the idea is that a big scare leads to a compromise, which can be brought back and demonstrated as a success. We have been moving away from that for some years in the Fisheries Council. I, for one, have not been arguing against the science when it is justified, and the Commission has been very serious about its proposals and increasingly reluctant to move from them. What I have not heard tonight—I put this mildly—is solutions

[Mr. Morley]

from the Opposition for the problem. It is difficult—and it will continue to be difficult. I appreciate the fact that the hon. Member for Congleton had some solutions; I am not sure that they were workable, but nevertheless, she had some solutions.

On some of the points that were raised, however, I should make it clear that I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Waveney that the science is paramount. I am genuinely sorry about what happened to the Colne fleet. As he knows, I have met those people many times. He still has an important fish market in that area, however, and an important inshore fleet with long-liners, and I recognise and take note of the fact that that is a very selective fishery.

I must correct what the hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings said about the Irish sea recovery plan. There have been some encouraging signs, although we must be cautious about the science. I shall talk about that in a moment. I should make it clear that the closed area was closed to all vessels, including beamers, from whatever country. It is not the case that we were closing it to our vessels while other vessels could go in—and that is not what I would want to see. The hon. Gentleman played the blame game a bit. He implied that other countries were responsible, and that we were not, but we must face up to our responsibility.

As for the impact on other countries, Germany and Sweden have already announced that they support the moratorium and will tie up their fleets. For other fleets, the Commission is calling for a 40 per cent. cut in effort for beam trawling. That will have an enormous impact on Holland and Belgium, and on France, which also has an important cod fishery. The implications are therefore not just for the UK. Other countries are facing difficult issues, too.

It is certainly true that the North sea mixed fishery is of dominant importance to the UK. The proposals for cod stocks—which, along with those for the mixed fishery of haddock and whiting, are in the greatest difficulty—will impact on us, and I do not dispute that they will impact on us in a big way. That is why Members have been right to raise their concerns.

However, I have some reassurance about effort. We are now making our calculations about what might be the effort reduction on the baseline figures to which the Commission is working. We have probably reduced effort by 12 per cent., so one can deduct that figure from whatever the Commission proposes. It may well be possible to increase it.

However, I want to be honest with the House about our thinking. I am not prepared to argue for reductions that I cannot justify on the science. I will argue for reductions, but only if there is a strong case. The Commission has heard it all before. Many countries will demand reductions of what it proposes. They will demand more quota, and the Commission has become cynical about that. However, the UK has been successful because we have been able to justify our position on strong scientific grounds. That is why the position on nephrops has changed. Because of our research, and the evidence, the Commission now recognises that there is no case for closing the nephrops fishery. The by-catch is tiny. That important change demonstrates that we can make progress.

I will write to the regional development agencies in England to alert them about the potential impacts on local areas. I agree with the hon. Member for Congleton that the way in which the issue of kilowatt days has been presented in the Commission as a blunt tool that will be used to force people into decommissioning by bankruptcy is not acceptable. We will not go along with that proposal. There may be merits in considering a kilowatt days effort regime, but that involves talking with the industry and making the proposals work.

I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Tynemouth that this is a time for cool heads; it is not a time for panicking. The industry should distinguish between what might look good and produce lots of excitement, and what will produce results. I am concerned with getting good results based on good science and sustainability. However, I will work closely with my colleagues in the Scottish Executive and the devolved Administrations. I recognise the points that hon. Members have made. I shall certainly stand up for the fishing industry of this country, but I shall do so on the basis of good science and sustainable management, while recognising the justification of the case that steps must be taken to deal with the severe decline in fish stocks.

Hon. Members will be coming to see me privately soon, and I will be able to go into the science in more detail then than I can in one minute now.

It being four hours after the commencement of business, MADAM DEPUTY SPEAKER, *put the Question necessary to dispose of the business at that hour, pursuant to Order [18 November].*

Question put, That the amendment be made:—

The House proceeded to a Division.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): I ask the Serjeant at Arms to investigate the delay in the No Lobby.

The House having divided: Ayes 32, Noes 232.

Division No. 005] **[5:18 pm**

AYES

Allan, Richard
Barrett, John
Beggs, Roy *(E Antrim)*
Beith, rh A. J.
Brooke, Mrs Annette L.
Burnett, John
Calton, Mrs Patsy
Campbell, rh Menzies *(NE Fife)*
Carmichael, Alistair
Chidgey, David
Cotter, Brian
Doughty, Sue
Ewing, Annabelle
Foster, Don *(Bath)*
George, Andrew *(St. Ives)*
Harris, Dr. Evan *(Oxford W & Abingdon)*
Heath, David
Holmes, Paul
Kennedy, rh Charles *(Ross Skye & Inverness)*
Moore, Michael
Öpik, Lembit
Price, Adam *(E Carmarthen & Dinefwr)*
Pugh, Dr. John
Robertson, Angus *(Moray)*
Russell, Bob *(Colchester)*
Salmond, Alex
Sanders, Adrian
Stunell, Andrew
Weir, Michael
Williams, Hywel *(Caernarfon)*
Williams, Roger *(Brecon)*
Wishart, Pete

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Alan Reid and
Sir Robert Smith

NOES

Adams, Irene *(Paisley N)*
Ainger, Nick
Allen, Graham
Anderson, rh Donald *(Swansea E)*
Armstrong, rh Ms Hilary
Atkins, Charlotte
Bailey, Adrian
Baird, Vera

Barnes, Harry
Battle, John
Bayley, Hugh
Beard, Nigel
Benn, Hilary
Bennett, Andrew
Benton, Joe *(Bootle)*
Best, Harold
Betts, Clive
Blizzard, Bob
Borrow, David
Bradley, Peter *(The Wrekin)*
Bradshaw, Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, rh Nicholas *(Newcastle E Wallsend)*
Brown, Russell *(Dumfries)*
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Byers, rh Stephen
Cairns, David
Campbell, Alan *(Tynemouth)*
Campbell, Mrs Anne *(C'bridge)*
Caplin, Ivor
Casale, Roger
Caton, Martin
Cawsey, Ian *(Brigg)*
Challen, Colin
Chapman, Ben *(Wirral S)*
Chaytor, David
Clapham, Michael
Clark, Mrs Helen *(Peterborough)*
Clark, Paul *(Gillingham)*
Clarke, rh Tom *(Coatbridge & Chryston)*
Clarke, Tony *(Northampton S)*
Clwyd, Ann *(Cynon V)*
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ms Ann
Cohen, Harry
Coleman, Iain
Colman, Tony
Connarty, Michael
Cook, rh Robin *(Livingston)*
Cooper, Yvette
Corston, Jean
Cranston, hon. Ross
Crausby, David
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John *(Hornchurch)*
Cunningham, Jim *(Coventry S)*
Dalyell, Tam
Davey, Valerie *(Bristol W)*
David, Wayne
Davidson, Ian
Dean, Mrs Janet
Dhanda, Parmjit
Doran, Frank
Dowd, Jim *(Lewisham W)*
Drew, David *(Stroud)*
Drown, Ms Julia
Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Eagle, Angela *(Wallasey)*
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Etherington, Bill
Farrelly, Paul
Field, rh Frank *(Birkenhead)*
Fisher, Mark
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flint, Caroline
Flynn, Paul *(Newport W)*
Foster, Michael *(Worcester)*
Foster, Michael Jabez *(Hastings & Rye)*
Foulkes, rh George
Francis, Dr. Hywel
Galloway, George
Gardiner, Barry
George, rh Bruce *(Walsall S)*
Gerrard, Neil
Gilroy, Linda
Griffiths, Jane *(Reading E)*
Griffiths, Win *(Bridgend)*
Grogan, John
Hall, Mike *(Weaver Vale)*
Hall, Patrick *(Bedford)*
Hamilton, David *(Midlothian)*
Harris, Tom *(Glasgow Cathcart)*
Havard, Dai *(Merthyr Tydfil & Rhymney)*
Hepburn, Stephen
Hesford, Stephen
Hewitt, rh Ms Patricia
Hill, Keith *(Streatham)*
Hodge, Margaret
Hoey, Kate *(Vauxhall)*
Hood, Jimmy *(Clydesdale)*
Hope, Phil *(Corby)*
Howarth, rh Alan *(Newport E)*
Howarth, George *(Knowsley N & Sefton E)*
Hughes, Kevin *(Doncaster N)*
Humble, Mrs Joan
Hurst, Alan *(Braintree)*
Hutton, rh John
Illsley, Eric
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Helen *(Hillsborough)*
Jones, Helen *(Warrington N)*
Jones, Jon Owen *(Cardiff C)*
Jones, Martyn *(Clwyd S)*
Joyce, Eric *(Falkirk W)*
Kelly, Ruth *(Bolton W)*
Kemp, Fraser
Kidney, David
King, Andy *(Rugby)*
King, Ms Oona *(Bethnal Green & Bow)*
Ladyman, Dr. Stephen
Lazarowicz, Mark
Lepper, David
Leslie, Christopher
Levitt, Tom *(High Peak)*
Liddell, rh Mrs Helen
Lloyd, Tony *(Manchester C)*
Love, Andrew
Luke, Iain *(Dundee E)*
McAvoy, Thomas
McCartney, rh Ian
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonnell, John
MacDougall, John
McIsaac, Shona
McKechin, Ann
Mactaggart, Fiona
McWilliam, John
Mahmood, Khalid
Mahon, Mrs Alice
Mallaber, Judy
Marsden, Gordon *(Blackpool S)*
Marshall, David *(Glasgow Shettleston)*
Marshall-Andrews, Robert
Meacher, rh Michael
Meale, Alan *(Mansfield)*
Merron, Gillian
Michael, rh Alun
Mitchell, Austin *(Gt Grimsby)*
Moffatt, Laura
Morgan, Julie
Morley, Elliot
Mountford, Kali
Mullin, Chris
Murphy, Jim *(Eastwood)*
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
Norris, Dan *(Wansdyke)*
O'Brien, Mike *(N Warks)*
Olner, Bill
O'Neill, Martin
Palmer, Dr. Nick
Picking, Anne
Pickthall, Colin
Pike, Peter *(Burnley)*
Plaskitt, James
Pollard, Kerry
Pond, Chris *(Gravesham)*
Pound, Stephen
Prentice, Ms Bridget *(Lewisham E)*
Prentice, Gordon *(Pendle)*
Prosser, Gwyn
Purchase, Ken
Quin, rh Joyce
Quinn, Lawrie
Rammell, Bill
Reed, Andy *(Loughborough)*
Reid, rh Dr. John *(Hamilton N & Bellshill)*
Roche, Mrs Barbara
Roy, Frank *(Motherwell)*
Ruddock, Joan
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mohammad
Savidge, Malcolm
Sedgemore, Brian
Sheerman, Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Shipley, Ms Debra
Skinner, Dennis
Smith, rh Andrew *(Oxford E)*
Smith, rh Chris *(Islington S & Finsbury)*
Smith, Jacqui *(Redditch)*
Smith, John *(Glamorgan)*
Smith, Llew *(Blaenau Gwent)*
Soley, Clive
Spellar, rh John
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Stevenson, George
Stewart, David *(Inverness E & Lochaber)*
Stewart, Ian *(Eccles)*
Stinchcombe, Paul
Stoate, Dr. Howard
Strang, rh Dr. Gavin
Taylor, rh Ann *(Dewsbury)*
Taylor, David *(NW Leics)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Clwyd W)*
Thomas, Gareth *(Harrow W)*
Tipping, Paddy
Todd, Mark *(S Derbyshire)*
Touhig, Don *(Islwyn)*
Trickett, Jon
Truswell, Paul
Turner, Dennis *(Wolverh'ton SE)*
Turner, Dr. Desmond *(Brighton Kemptown)*
Turner, Neil *(Wigan)*
Twigg, Derek *(Halton)*
Tynan, Bill *(Hamilton S)*
Vaz, Keith *(Leicester E)*
Vis, Dr. Rudi
Wareing, Robert N.
Watson, Tom *(W Bromwich E)*
Watts, David
White, Brian
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Wicks, Malcolm
Williams, rh Alan *(Swansea W)*
Wilson, Brian
Wray, James *(Glasgow Baillieston)*
Wright, Anthony D. *(Gt Yarmouth)*
Wright, David *(Telford)*
Wright, Tony *(Cannock)*
Wyatt, Derek

Tellers for the Noes:
Joan Ryan and
Mr. John Heppell

Question accordingly negatived.

Main Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House takes note of European Union documents No. COM (02) 181, Commission Communication on the reform of the Common Fisheries Policy ("Roadmap"), No. COM (02) 185, draft Council Regulation on the conservation and sustainable exploitation of fisheries resources under the Common Fisheries Policy, No. COM (02) 187, draft Council Regulation amending Regulation (EC) No. 2792/1999 laying down the detailed rules and arrangements regarding Community structural assistance in the fisheries sector, No. COM (02) 190, draft Council Regulation establishing an emergency Community measure for scrapping fishing vessels, No. COM (02) 186, Commission Communication, a Community Action Plan to integrate environmental protection requirements into the Common Fisheries Policy, and No. COM (02) 180, Commission Communication, a Community Action Plan for the eradication of illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing; and supports the Government's objectives, which are to work for a Common Fisheries Policy that is environmentally and economically sustainable, to strengthen the Common Fisheries Policy's regional dimension, to increase industry involvement in decisions on fisheries management and conservation and improve the dialogue between fishermen and scientists, to increase the integration of environmental concerns into fisheries management, to introduce clearer procedures for responding quickly to conservation emergencies, to confirm the 6 and 12-mile access restrictions on a permanent basis, to continue relative stability (including the Hague Preference) and retain the Shetland Box, to ensure greater effectiveness and consistency in control and

enforcement of European Union requirements, while attempting to simplify the burden of control on fishermen, to improve the value for money of third country agreements and their coherence with development and environmental objectives and to promote the effective operation of Regional Fisheries Organizations.

Committee of Selection

Motion made, and Question proposed,

That Mr John Hayes be discharged from the Committee of Selection and Mr Peter Luff be added to the Committee.—*[Keith Hill.]*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Mr. Speaker has chosen the amendment in the name of Pete Wishart.

5.36 pm

Chairman of the Committee of Selection (Mr. John McWilliam): The Committee of Selection exists under the private business Standing Orders and not the public business Standing Orders. The principal function of the Committee was originally, and still is, to appoint members of private Committees. That is because, in previous times, private interests promoted much of the legislation that passed through the House. The canals and railways were built using private Bills, as were toll roads. I know of a bridge in Oxfordshire where one has to pay a toll of one old penny—I think that it is now 5p—to cross. That has been our principal role and it remains so today.

The motion seeks to discharge the hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr. Hayes) from the Committee of Selection and appoint in his place the hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Luff). The change is consequent on a recent shadow Cabinet reshuffle in which the hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings was made shadow Agriculture Minister. If anybody was in any doubt about that, they should have been present for the winding-up speeches in the previous debate. The hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire then took his place as the Conservative party's pairing Whip.

I take this opportunity to thank the hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings for the service that he gave the Committee and his good-natured contributions. I wish him well in his future role. To judge by his performance earlier, he needs no encouragement from me.

For many years, the Opposition pairing Whip had a seat on the Committee of Selection. His role is to propose the names of official Opposition Members to serve on Standing and Select Committees and, of course, private Bill Committees. The membership change is therefore essential to enable the Committee of Selection to carry out the work delegated to it by the House. Such changes in membership are not unusual. A similar change was made on 17 October 2001 when the hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings replaced the hon. Member for Beverley and Holderness (Mr. Cran). On 5 November 2001, my hon. Friend the Member for Enfield, North (Joan Ryan) replaced my hon. Friend the Member for Regent's Park and Kensington, North (Ms Buck).

Mr. Alex Salmond (Banff and Buchan): The hon. Gentleman has described the duties and background of the Committee of Selection. Could it discharge its duties effectively if a member of the minority parties sat on it?

Mr. McWilliam: I shall deal with that later in my peroration. I intend to cover that specific point in the context of the amendment.

I thank hon. Members who served the Committee so well. Their service was greatly appreciated by my colleagues who remain members of the Committee. I congratulate the new members on their role. I look forward to the hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire joining us in due course.

The motion first appeared on the Order Paper on 15 October during unopposed private business immediately after Prayers. Hon. Members objected to it then and subsequently, resulting in today's debate. Scottish National party and Plaid Cymru Members were among those who objected. The debate may therefore provide a good opportunity to inform hon. Members about how the Committee of Selection deals with smaller parties.

As required by private business Standing Order No. 109, the Committee has only nine members, of whom six are Labour, two Conservative and one Liberal Democrat. The composition is in proportion to that of the House. There are currently 410 Labour Members, 163 Conservative Members, 53 Liberal Democrats, nine SNP or Plaid Cymru Members, six Ulster Unionists, five Democratic Unionist party Members, four Sinn Fein Members, three Social Democratic and Labour party Members and two independent Members, as well as the Speaker and the Deputy Speakers.

We take great care to ensure that we adhere to the proportions that I outlined. If we take 651 Members of the House as a base, 0.630 are Labour, 0.250 are Conservative and 0.120 are others. Hon. Members who care to work out how nine Members can represent 651 in those proportions will realise that it is difficult. We take the matter seriously: we work out the figures and round them up, which is when matters become interesting.

Enabling minority parties such as the SNP and Plaid Cymru to qualify for a seat would make for a large and unwieldy Committee, which would benefit neither its members nor the House. On a Committee of nine, such as the Committee of Selection, the composition is six Labour Members, two Conservative Members and a member of the largest minority party, the Liberal Democrats.

Until recently, the Liberal Democrats represented the smaller parties on the Committee of Selection. A problem arose last year, and the matter was raised through the usual channels. An agreement was made whereby Government Whips now represent the smaller parties. The new arrangement appears to have worked satisfactorily. At least, I have heard no complaints, and I am sure that the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond), who has known me for many years, would not feel diffident about picking up the telephone or dropping me a note. I encourage that. If any hon. Members have difficulties about the Committee of Selection, I would be happy to discuss its work with them.

The arrangement worked but it broke down and the replacement is satisfactory. Anxieties have been expressed about the representation of the smaller parties on the Liaison Committee. That Committee is not nominated by the Committee of Selection. Almost all the Committees appointed by the Committee of Selection are proposed using the formula that I have described to ensure that their composition reflects as accurately as possible the balance of the parties in the House.

The few exceptions are special cases, such as the Select Committee on Northern Ireland Affairs, on which the smaller parties are over-represented—and correctly so. I often chair the Northern Ireland Grand Committee, and I take great pains to ensure that the parties whose members are based in Northern Ireland have some precendence for speaking, because they could otherwise be swamped. It is not only the Committee of Selection that does that; the Chairmen's Panel is also aware of such issues and we try our best to ensure that that happens.

I mentioned that the Committee of Selection was based on the private business Standing Orders. We still have an important role in selecting private Committees. We have had a change since the Committee of Selection was first set up. Obviously, the decision to add the setting up of Standing Committees and Select Committees to the Committee of Selection's tasks was a sensible one for the House to make. It saved setting up a totally different Committee and meant that the Committee's role continued.

Mr. Salmond: I know from previous experience that the hon. Gentleman is a very fair-minded man, but he is being less than fair to his Committee. There are 25 Members from minority parties in the House, and the membership of a number of Committees—including the Select Committee on Environment, Food and Rural Affairs—has been expanded to allow a minority party to be represented. With his long experience of fairness, does he consider it an unreasonable objective that each minority party should sit on one departmental Select Committee, over and above the territorial Committees on which they obviously have to be represented?

Mr. McWilliam: The hon. Gentleman raises an interesting point. In the case of the SNP, there is a Parliament in Edinburgh to which much of the work that the departmental Select Committees do down here has been devolved. Only the retained functions continue to be dealt with here. I would think it silly to have a member of the SNP on any Committee whose functions, as they affect Scotland, have been totally devolved.

Pete Wishart (North Tayside): Following that logic, may I presume that the hon. Gentleman would have no problem if a minority party managed to secure membership of a non-territorial departmental Select Committee that examines the reserved powers?

Mr. McWilliam: I recall a period when the official Unionist party had a place on the Select Committee on Defence, which it lost because all its Members stood for re-election. I cannot remember the reason for that, although I am sure that it was a good one. When they resigned their seats, however, the place had to be reallocated, and it was allocated to the official Opposition. I think that I might have been one of the beneficiaries of that. Anyway, that is what happened.

To increase the representation of the SNP and Plaid Cymru, we would, as I have said, have to shove the membership of the Committee of Selection up to an

[Mr. McWilliam]

unwieldy number. On the principle that the hon. Gentleman raised, however, the Scottish Parliament has powers to enact private legislation. Indeed, it would be difficult to envisage an instance in which it would be appropriate for the Scottish promoter of a private Bill to promote it in this House rather than in the Scottish Parliament. I shall try to drag up an example instantly. If someone were proposing to do something on Ministry of Defence land, that would probably fall within the remit of this House, but I cannot think of anything else that would.

The Government of Wales Act 1998 provides for a different position. I had the privilege of chairing part of the deliberations on that legislation on the Floor of the House. I remind hon. Members that, although the Welsh Assembly does not deal with private legislation as such, it may promote it in this House. Although there are controls over that, somebody could petition the Welsh Assembly to promote a private Bill here, but the Assembly must vote to promote such a measure, with two thirds of Members in favour. Two thirds of Members do not need to be present, however.

I understand that discussions are taking place between the Wales Office and the Assembly on whether to amend that provision to provide more flexibility for the Assembly. I do not know how those discussions are proceeding—I am in no position to know—but I understand why Plaid Cymru Members and Welsh Members of other parties may want to make such a change.

Before I sit down, I must thank personally the right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir George Young) for so ably stepping into the breach, which he did not have to fill, to look after the interests of the official Opposition while the hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Luff) was away doing other duties such as preparing for the debate earlier this evening. The right hon. Gentleman stepped in with his usual wit and charm—he is always a welcome and useful member of my Committee.

Having said that, I have probably banged on long enough. The basis of my objection to the amendment is simple and straightforward: if there were to be a member of the Committee of Selection from a minority party, I would argue that the Scottish National party is the least appropriate minority party to have one; were the Committee of Selection to be expanded to such a size as to enable the minority parties to be represented, I would argue that it was of such a size as to be unwieldy.

Pete Wishart: According to the hon. Gentleman's logic, that rule applies to SNP Members, but surely it should also apply to Scottish Labour Back Benchers, two of whom chair Select Committees?

Mr. McWilliam: It strikes me that the Department of Trade and Industry has some powers devolved and some not, so I would not worry too much about that.

If expanded to such a size, the Committee would become too unwieldy to work. As members of the Committee know, sometimes we have to meet because someone has got something wrong or some mechanism has got stuck. I must tell the House that I do not believe in back-door deals. We do not always meet in a Committee Room, but we always have a quorum and we always have a Clerk present if we have to amend a proposal before it goes on the Order Paper so as to enable the decision to be taken cleanly and properly.

Having said that, I ask hon. Members to vote against the amendment and for the Government motion.

5.53 pm

Pete Wishart (North Tayside): I beg to move, To leave out "Mr Peter Luff" and insert "Pete Wishart".

We have nothing against the hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Luff), whom I am sure will prove to be a worthy and constructive member of the Committee of Selection. We have moved the amendment to draw attention to the plight of the minority parties. Our dispute has nothing to do with him, as he well knows, but everything to do with the treatment of the minority parties at the hands of the House.

If the House, in its wisdom, agrees to put me on the Committee of Selection, I pledge to be diligent. I will do all that I can to represent the interests not just of minority parties but of the Government and the official Opposition and to ensure that they both get all the Select Committee places that they feel entitled to or require.

Mr. McWilliam: I hope that the hon. Gentleman realises that the role that he has described is one that I take very much to heart—it is the role that I attempt to play and have always attempted to play on the Committee. I try to be as objective, fair, open and honest as I can and I try to make certain that everybody gets a fair deal.

Pete Wishart: I would not dare question the hon. Gentleman's integrity. I am sure he is absolutely right.

We tabled the amendment because we were almost at our wits' end. We wondered what more we had to do to convince the House that we in the minority parties want to be recognised as a significant constituency, and to play a constructive role in the House's business.

The hon. Member for Blaydon (Mr. McWilliam) described me as an SNP Member, but I also represent all the minority parties this evening. We work well together, as he was gracious enough to acknowledge, but ours is very much a business arrangement. Little unites us politically. At the end of the day, when a Division is called, we go into different Lobbies, and that is fine and dandy. On one matter, however, we overwhelmingly agree: we in the minority parties deserve better from the House.

Jim Sheridan (West Renfrewshire): The hon. Gentleman said that he would act responsibly in representing the House. I find that astounding, given that he and the rest of his party work against the House's best interests, talk it down and indeed seek to get rid of it.

Pete Wishart: The hon. Gentleman is well aware of information collected by POLIS that shows how effectively Scottish Back Benchers contribute to

debate here. Invariably, SNP Members have topped any contributions by Labour Members. I will not be lectured by the hon. Gentleman.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I hope that we shall hear no more of this discussion, as it is well beyond the terms of the amendment.

Pete Wishart: Thank you for your guidance, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

The House must recognise that we in the minority parties are now 23-strong. Our membership is almost half that of the Liberal Democrats, but we have nothing like the same number of Select Committee places and nothing like the same influence in the House. The Liberal Democrats are on every Select Committee, while we are on only seven out of 46. The Liberal Democrats are a fair party that believes in proportionality. Let us see how proportional representation applies to these circumstances.

To be fair to the Liberal Democrats, it must be said that they are only looking after their own, within the rules and confines of the House. I know that it is different in the Committee of Selection, but the average Select Committee has 11 places. According to the rules, seven must be reserved for the Government, three for the official Opposition and one for the other minority parties, including the Liberal Democrats. Who can blame the Liberal Democrats for snaffling all the places for themselves? Why should they care about the other minority parties? Even when they were responsible for looking after the interests of the minority parties, they still took all the seats.

Something is not working here when a constituency of this size can be overlooked. If our membership is about half the size of that of the Liberal Democrats, we should be given about half the number of places that they currently have.

Mr. McWilliam: So who is to be cut in half?

Pete Wishart: I could suggest several candidates. I am looking in front of me, but I will not comment.

I pledge that I would be a diligent member of the Committee of Selection. In some respects, things have improved for the minority parties. The hon. Gentleman mentioned the new arrangement whereby the Government Whips represent the minority parties, and I must say that that has been a very satisfactory solution. We have access to the usual channels.

Anne Picking (East Lothian): You said earlier that minority parties get together to discuss how you want to work, but that your pathways often diverge when it comes to political decisions. How can you possibly effectively—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Lady should use correct parliamentary language. When she says "you", she is addressing the Chair.

Anne Picking: I am sorry Mr. Deputy Speaker—I am not used to being on my feet. I do not get many opportunities to speak, because my party has such a large majority.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. If the hon. Lady makes regular applications to speak, she may find that she is more successful.

Anne Picking: Point taken, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

How can the hon. Gentleman represent the minority parties when they are not of the same ilk politically?

Pete Wishart: Perhaps the hon. Lady should make better use of her few opportunities to address this House than by asking such an innocuous question. As I tried to explain, our coming together is a business arrangement. We do not hide the fact that we take different political positions on certain issues. Such an arrangement allows us to progress the case of minority parties in this House.

Things have improved for the minority parties under the tutelage of the Government Whips, who look after our interests. We now have access to the usual channels, and we get quicker and improved access to the business of the House. We have managed to secure most of the places that we seek in Standing Committees and other such Committees. The Government have been generous—they have given us an allotted time to debate matters in the House, and for that we are grateful.

I seek this place on the Committee of Selection—I am ensuring that I say that several times—because in some respects things have got worse for the minority parties. Joint Committees of both Houses, which are increasingly used, are 24-strong. Even according to the crude arithmetic of this House, the minority parties should have a place on them. They look after crucial national issues such as Lords reform and communication, which is fundamental and essential to Northern Ireland, Wales and Scotland. We are overlooked in their membership, and the House should address that.

The hon. Member for Blaydon was generous enough to refer to the Liaison Committee, which has 32 members. Again according to the crude arithmetic of this House, we should have a place—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman used the word "generous", and I was extremely generous in allowing the Chairman of the Committee of Selection to deploy his arguments. However, we have gone rather wide of the amendment to which the hon. Gentleman is speaking.

Pete Wishart: I am grateful for that correction, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I mention the Liaison Committee because I do not want to be just a member of the Committee of Selection but to be its Chairman so that I can qualify for the Liaison Committee. That is a reasonable demand, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because as you and hon. Members know, to be a member of the Liaison Committee one has to be a Chairman of a Select Committee. If that is the only mechanism to get a member of a minority party on to the Liaison Committee, make me the Chairman of the Committee of Selection. I am sure that the hon. Member for Blaydon would have no particular objection to that.

I believe that the Government understand and appreciate the plight of minority parties in this House, and we have heard some sympathetic noises from them. I meet representatives of the Government Whips Office weekly, and those meetings are useful and constructive. Government Whips do not deserve their fearsome reputation—they are a convivial bunch of chaps who are easy to do business with. The Leader of the House appreciates the plight of the minority parties. To judge

[Pete Wishart]

from his correspondence with me, and his responses to points raised in the House, he seems sympathetic to our cause. He says that he is looking for solutions, and I take that at face value. Nor do I want to exclude the Conservatives, who have been more than helpful in their new arrangement. I seek to be on the Committee of Selection so that I can build on such relationships with Front-Bench Members. It has also been useful to be told how we could perhaps create merry havoc in the House by continuing with this campaign.

I wish that I could extend this expression of good will to the Liberal Democrats, but, alas, that would be taking the spirit of generosity a bit too far. There is no truer saying than that you never know where you are with the Liberal Democrats—the pick-and-mix people of politics. They are responsible for looking after the minority parties, yet they took away the only non-territorial departmental Select Committee that SNP-Plaid Cymru had. Their stewardship of minority parties has been about as useful as a chocolate frying pan. I wish that the expressions of good will that we have detected from Government Front Benchers, the Leader of the House's office and Conservative Members could be translated into Select Committee places. We welcome the support, but we would rather have the places.

Mr. Bill Tynan (Hamilton, South): Has the hon. Gentleman approached the Modernisation Committee on this matter, or has he simply taken this opportunity to further his career?

Pete Wishart: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his concern about my career. I am touched, but he makes a good point about the Modernisation Committee, which has two Liberal Democrat members. Why does it not have one Liberal, and one member from a minority party?

We are getting there, step by step. The House must recognise that it has obligations and should appear to be as representative as possible. That is why I am seeking this place on the Committee of Selection.

Jim Sheridan: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that, if the House accepts his amendment, the incentive for minority parties to become majority parties will be removed?

Pete Wishart: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman's concern about the possibility that my party could become a majority party in this House. I assure him that it has no ambition in that direction. The House will have to ensure at some point that minority parties with substantial constituencies are properly represented. Minorities should be over-represented, not overlooked.

I realise that the amendment is unlikely to be accepted, and I accept the arithmetic that shows that the minority parties in the House have only 23 Members. However, the SNP is the second party in Scotland, and the official Opposition there. The same is true of Plaid Cymru in Wales, and the hon. Member for East Antrim (Mr. Beggs) belongs to a party that, when Stormont sits, effectively forms the Government of Northern Ireland. I hope that that Assembly will sit again before too long.

Collectively, the minority parties represent 1.5 million people in the UK. For some time, I have wondered why it is not possible for me to be on the Committee of Selection. If I catch Mr. Speaker's eye, I can take part in the business of the House, participate in debates, ask questions and serve on Standing Committees. Why, then, are the minority parties under-represented on Select Committees when their members can play a full part in the House otherwise? We are told that we are too few in number, but why are we unable to gain access only to the departmental Select Committees?

I hope that this campaign will allow the House to understand more fully the position of the minority parties. The House depends on the good will of all parties to function. We believe that, if that good will is not shown to us, we have every right to withdraw our good will in return. Our campaign is to increase our influence in the House, but we are not asking for all that much. It is not unreasonable for each minority party to be given one place on a non-departmental Select Committee beyond their territory.

Anne Picking: Will the hon. Gentleman explain what he means when he says that his party will withdraw good will?

Pete Wishart: We do not want to come to the House time and again to put forward our case for increased representation here. I hope that the House is beginning to understand that we want to play a constructive part in the House's workings and institutions.

Mr. John Burnett (Torridge and West Devon): We all hope that members of one of the minority parties will grace the House with their presence at the debate on next year's Finance Bill.

Pete Wishart: In that case, I hope that the hon. Gentleman will support us if we put in a bid to serve on the Finance Bill Committee. All too often we put in bids to serve on Standing Committees, only to be knocked back. We put in bids to be involved in Select Committees and are knocked back.

Mr. Salmond: I recall an amendment to the Treasury Committee's membership when I was nominated to replace, admittedly, a Liberal Democrat Member. The hon. Member for Torridge and West Devon (Mr. Burnett) voted against me, presumably because he did not want me to scrutinise items such as the Budget and the Finance Bill.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. That was an interesting piece of parliamentary history, but has little to do with the amendment.

Pete Wishart: Even so, it is a point well made.

I shall conclude, Mr. Deputy Speaker, because I think that I have tested your patience in trying to stay in order. What we are asking for is not unreasonable—we are asking for one place in a non-territorial departmental Select Committee. Give us a place on the Liaison Committee for goodness' sake—it is 32-strong. Surely a

place could be found for a member of the minority parties. I do not think that we are asking for much. I ask the House to give us our place.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Before I call the next speaker, I remind the House that I have been generous so far in my interpretation of the motion and the amendment. In the time remaining, however, I appeal to right hon. and hon. Members to stay strictly in order in debating the amendment.

6.11 pm

Mr. Roy Beggs (East Antrim): I will adhere strictly to your guidance, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Let me say first that I have the highest admiration and respect for the hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Luff), and I congratulate the hon. Member for North Tayside (Pete Wishart) on the way in which he put his case.

I wish to register support for the principle that a place should be found on the Committee of Selection and other Committees so that the voice of a representative of the small minority parties can be heard. The small minority parties have met and are agreed that when given an opportunity to serve, we can, by agreement, put forward a representative. For that reason, I support the hon. Member for North Tayside and agree that he should be appointed to the Committee of Selection. At this time, he is the agreed representative of small minority parties in the House. On the basis of seeking greater inclusivity of Committee membership and in order to give Committee experience to small parties through agreed rotation of their representative, I hope that the House will seek to provide the opportunity to serve on the Committee of Selection and other Committees to the agreed representative of the small minority parties, at the earliest possible opportunity, if not tonight.

The hon. Member for North Tayside has played keyboard with Runrig; he has made music to the delight of many audiences for 15 years and is, I think, the only Member of the House to have appeared on "Top of the Pops". His inclusion on the Committee of Selection or any other Committee would no doubt bring harmony to this House. I believe that it would also increase the sense of worth and equal value of every Member and party represented in the House. I support the amendment.

6.13 pm

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): Although the debate seems on the face of it to be about the specific issue of the replacement of one of my hon. Friends with another Member in the routine way that the Chairman of the Committee of Selection has described, it subsumes some bigger issues that have been touched on and to which I hope I will be allowed to refer, however briefly, because they are very important to the House. For that reason, I am very grateful to the hon. Member for North Tayside (Pete Wishart) for allowing us to touch on these issues this evening. I hope that the Government will take this seriously and allow us collectively to consider the issues again. They are, no more and no less, the role of the minority parties at large in the House and its Committees and institutions. When I talk of minority parties, I refer not only to the Scottish National party, Plaid Cymru, the Ulster Unionists, the Democratic Unionist party and the Social Democratic and Labour party but also to the Liberal Democrats, who are a minority party in the House.

If we consider the total minority party membership, it is about 80 Members in 659—or about 650 if we exclude you and your colleagues, Mr. Deputy Speaker—so there could be a case for saying that the minority parties generally should have proportionate representation on all Committees, including the Committee of Selection.

Mr. Andrew Stunell (Hazel Grove): Does the right hon. Gentleman recall that earlier this year the House voted on the Modernisation Committee proposals, which included reform of the operation of the Committee of Selection? Had that been accepted by the House, there would indeed have been a minority representative on the Committee and the problem would have been overcome. May I remind the right hon. Gentleman that he voted against that reform and for the entrenchment of the arrangements that he is criticising?

Mr. Forth: I am more than proud to vote against most of the rubbish that emanates from the Modernisation Committee, and hope to continue to do so.

The issue is wider than the Committee of Selection. My argument is a much more general and, if I may say so, generous one: we should treat the minority parties collectively, as I have described them, in an even-handed way. We could thus properly extend the hand of generosity and recognition to all the minority parties, not least on the Committee of Selection, as is being suggested.

This is a microcosm of the much wider debate that should take place, not, I hope, in the Modernisation Committee but in a much more sensible forum where we could achieve some generosity and common sense. I was interested that tribute was rightly paid to the current custodianship of the Government Whips Office—represented in this debate in such a distinguished way by the Government Deputy Chief Whip—for an abler and much fairer representation of the minority parties than the Liberal Democrats managed. I pay tribute to the Government for that.

The issue goes from the particular to the general. The particular issue is important, but I hope that Members of the minority parties will not press it to a vote, although they have correctly used it as a vehicle for this debate, which I welcome because it is important.

Pete Wishart: We do not want to divide the House this evening. We have made our case as we intended.

Mr. Forth: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his decency and generosity in saying that. As I said, he has properly used the matter as an opportunity for a debate, but he has generously said that he will not press it to a vote. He realises, as the Chairman of the Committee of Selection pointed out, that such changes of membership are routine. They occur from time to time in order to recognise the changes that take place in the ranks of the Government and the official Opposition, so from that point of view they are uncontroversial.

I hope, however, that following this debate, which has been conducted in a good-natured and constructive way, we shall have further opportunities to examine in a

[Mr. Forth]

broader sense the representation of the minority parties throughout the Committee structure, so that we can properly recognise the role played by all the minority parties, including of course the Liberal Democrats.

Andrew Bennett (Denton and Reddish): Should we not also look at their attendance? The right hon. Gentleman will be aware that the minority parties took the Liberal place on the Joint Committee on Statutory Instruments, as the Liberal Member did not turn up for 12 months. Minority party attendance at that Committee is not especially good.

Mr. Forth: I recognise what the hon. Gentleman says, but I do not think that it would be productive or proper to get into that point at this stage, although it may become a consideration in the future. If, for example, we were able to guarantee the minority parties collectively a place on each Committee, which is really what the hon. Member for North Tayside was asking for, we might find that they would respond by taking their attendance a bit more seriously. If the Liberal Democrats' representation were reduced, that might concentrate their minds a bit, which would help to answer the point made by the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Bennett).

We now have an opportunity to reconsider the role that all the minority parties play in the House and in Committees, and there is a case to be made for saying that if we took the minority parties together, and allocated the total of their 80 Members to Committees according to proportionality, we could come to a fair and proper conclusion. The debate has allowed us to look ahead. We have seen the generosity of spirit displayed by the hon. Member for North Tayside in saying that he has brought the matter to the attention of the House but he does not propose to divide the House, and I am grateful to him for that.

In closing, I express my gratitude to my right hon. Friend the Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir George Young) for, in his usual way, so ably helping and representing the official Opposition during this period of hiatus, which I hope will shortly come to an end as we conclude this debate. I hope that the Minister will be able to respond positively to the suggestions made by minority party representatives and myself so that we can look forward to a more even-handed and fair distribution of representation than we have seen hitherto.

6.21 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary, Privy Council Office (Mr. Ben Bradshaw): I echo the comments made by the shadow Leader of the House, the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth), about this being a constructive, positive debate, and I hope that he will find my responses characteristically positive.

The motion before the House is routine and straightforward. It has been outlined by the Chairman of the Committee of Selection, my hon. Friend the Member for Blaydon (Mr. McWilliam). The change being sought comes as a consequence of the recent shadow Cabinet reshuffle in which the hon. Member for South Holland and The Deepings (Mr. Hayes) was made a shadow Agriculture Minister and the hon. Member for Mid-Worcestershire (Mr. Luff) took his place as the Conservative pairing Whip. As has already been explained, for many years the official Opposition's pairing Whip has had a seat on the Committee of Selection. His role is to propose the names of official Opposition Members to serve on Standing and Select Committees. The membership change that we are debating is essential for the Committee to carry out its work as delegated to it by the House.

The Committee of Selection was established under private business Standing Order No. 109. It has, as my hon. Friend the Member for Blaydon has already explained, nine members, of which six currently are Labour, two Conservative and one Liberal Democrat. That breakdown is proportionate to the political composition of the House. It has been pointed out that until recently the smaller parties were represented on the Committee by the Liberal Democrats, but that arrangement broke down last year.

Mr. Forth: Why?

Mr. Bradshaw: It is not for me to go into any grief between two minority parties, but the smaller parties are now represented by the Government. As we have heard, that arrangement seems to have worked satisfactorily, and I believe that the hon. Member for Moray (Angus Robertson) said from a sedentary position that it is much better.

The hon. Member for North Tayside, however, was slightly unfair about the Liberal Democrats' relationship with the rest of the minority parties. Far be it from me to come to the defence of the Liberal Democrats, but I understand that there are six examples of seats on Standing Committees being given up by the Liberal Democrats to the smaller minority parties. There also seems to be confusion about what constitutes a minority party, or at least a failure to be strict enough in our terminology.

Mr. Forth: No, no.

Mr. Bradshaw: The right hon. Gentleman may disagree, but in this debate the term "minority party" has been used by some to include the Liberal Democrats and by others to exclude them.

Mr. Salmond: I am interested in what the Minister means by "giving up" places. It has been said that if the minority parties, whose Members add up to almost half the number of Liberal Democrat Members, had half their number of Committee places, we would be more than satisfied. However, we have only a fraction of that at the moment. Does what the Minister said about giving up places mean that other Members in the House are given a place on a Committee only because someone has given it up? Is not there an entitlement?

Mr. Bradshaw: I am simply seeking to point out to the House that on six occasions, at the request of minority parties—largely, I have to say, at the request of the Scottish National party—the Liberal Democrats have given up places on Standing Committees.

Blocking this change in membership—the effect of the amendment—is helpful to no one, although I appreciate that Opposition Members have concerns about smaller party representation. Indeed, that concern is shared, particularly by my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House. He shares their desire to ensure that the matter is treated with fairness.

I appreciate the fact that the hon. Member for North Tayside was generous enough to acknowledge that matters had improved not only under this Government but under my right hon. Friend's stewardship. I was slightly sorry to hear the hon. Gentleman express veiled threats about what might happen in relation to co-operating with the business of the House if things did not improve even more quickly. I am sorry about that and hope that he will not feel the need to follow through with any of those threats.

I wish to quote from a letter that my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House wrote in response to a letter that he received from the hon. Members for Banff and Buchan (Mr. Salmond) and for Meirionnydd Nant Conwy (Mr. Llwyd) on 14 November. *[Interruption.]* I am sorry about my pronunciation; my Welsh is not great. My right hon. Friend said:

"When the House voted against an overall increase in the size of select committees last May"—

as was pointed out by the hon. Member for Hazel Grove (Mr. Stunell)—

"it turned down the opportunity to offer up to fifty additional colleagues places on select committees. I hope that the Committee of Selection will bear the needs of the minority parties in mind when considering members for new, or expanded, committees."

I hope that the Chairman of the Committee of Selection, my hon. Friend the Member for Blaydon, has heard me repeat those words in the Chamber this evening.

Mr. McWilliam: May I reassure my hon. Friend that I was present to hear those words the first time, and they are always in my mind?

Mr. Bradshaw: I am very grateful to my hon. Friend for that intervention.

I would have gone on to quote from the response by the Leader of the House to the queries from the Scottish National party and Plaid Cymru on their grievances about representation on the Liaison Committee. However, Mr. Deputy Speaker, as you ruled out of order the points that were made on that matter earlier in the debate, I would imagine that you would not be too pleased if I did so now.

Mr. Deputy Speaker *indicated assent.*

Mr. Bradshaw: Very well, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

In an earlier letter to the hon. Member for North Tayside back, I think, in September, my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House said that he could only address his concerns when opportunities arose in the natural flow of business. That is our desire and intention. He went on to say that he hoped that the minority parties had found the Government helpful in Standing Committees, where we have helped to engineer extra places for the smaller parties. Of course an extra Opposition day has been created for the smaller parties as well. My right hon. Friend concluded by saying that he remained alive to the hon. Gentleman's concerns.

Mr. Forth: The hon. Gentleman is trying to be positive and helpful, but I am a bit worried about the phrase "the natural flow of business". It strikes me that it implies that, whereas the Government will try to manoeuvre something here or there and perhaps make a little concession, they will make no positive effort seriously to consider the issue to find a more permanent solution. I hope that he is saying that he will go beyond the natural flow of business and try to do something proactive.

Mr. Bradshaw: With all respect, as the hon. Member for Hazel Grove has said, the Government had a good go at this—at least my right hon. Friend did—back in May, and we failed, not least because some Members, such as the right hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Mr. Forth), voted against the proposals. However, we intend to take the issue seriously. During the flow of business, positions arise on Committees and new Select Committees even come into existence, so there will be plenty of opportunities not for me—it is not my role—but for the Chairman of the Committee of Selection to take such things into consideration.

Mr. Stunell: Do I take it that the implication of the Minister's last remarks is that the Government intend to bring those proposals back to the House? That would be very much welcomed by me, and, I would have thought, by Members from the minority nationalist parties and Northern Ireland.

Mr. Bradshaw: I am sorry to have to disappoint the hon. Gentleman, but it is not realistic to imagine that the Government would bring those proposals back so soon after they were defeated in such a way. I am sure that that is a great disappointment, not just to him but to many other Members who voted for those sensible proposals.

More recently, on 17 October, in reply to a question from the hon. Member for North Tayside, my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House repeated again that he was

"very much aware of the grievance of the minority parties on the question of appointments to Committees."

He pointed out that there had been a lot of correspondence on the matter on several occasions, and that he would continue to look into a solution, adding:

"There will be plenty of procedural opportunities for him to make his point."—[*Official Report*, 17 October 2002; Vol. 390, c. 475.]

That is exactly what the hon. Gentleman is doing this evening, as he made clear in his speech—it was not primarily about his unrealistic aim to get a place on the Committee of Selection, let alone the chairmanship of it, but to make the point that the minority or smaller parties were under-represented generally on Committees.

If I may, I would like to disabuse the House of the idea that the smaller parties are suffering some terrible injustice. If one looks at the figures, one sees that the breakdown in relation to Members from small parties on

[Mr. Bradshaw]

public business Standing Order Committees, plus modernisation and House of Lords reform Committees, is as follows: Liberal Democrats, 33, official Unionists, five, Plaid Cymru, three, Scottish national party, two, Social Democratic and Labour party, one, Democratic Unionist party, one, and Independent, one. That is a total of 46. If that number were broken down with strict proportionality, the total would be 45. The number of Liberal Democrats would be 31, so one could argue that the Liberal Democrats are currently over-represented by two. There would be three official Unionists, so they are also currently over-represented by two. The Democratic Unionist party would have three members, so it is currently under-represented by two. The Scottish national party would have three, so, under strict proportionality, it is under-represented by one. Plaid Cymru would have two, so it is over-represented by one. The Social Democratic and Labour party would have two, so it is under-represented by one, and Independents would have one, which is supposed to be strictly proportional, although there is only one Independent Member, so, strictly speaking, the Independents would be eligible for only half a place.

Mr. Salmond: The Minister should understand that those figures take into account the Select Committee on Northern Ireland Affairs, on which, clearly, all the Northern Irish parties must be represented. He should not therefore use that argument to distort figures elsewhere. Is he also aware that those figures include the Catering Committee, which was not our first choice in terms of Committee places?

Mr. Bradshaw: I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman has that view of the Catering Committee—

Andrew Bennett: That illustrates that not all the Committees are exciting to sit on. Can the Minister give us not only the numbers on each of the Committees, but figures on the attendance on each of them?

Mr. Bradshaw: I am afraid that I do not have the numbers on each of the Committees to hand. If my hon. Friend will allow me, I am happy to write to him with a breakdown of all the figures. I shall try my best to obtain figures for attendance, too, which I am sure many Members would find extremely interesting. He is absolutely right to suggest that if parties want positions on important or sexy Committees, they should also be willing to do the work on the duller, less glamorous Committees, many of which are just as important to the workings of the House and in terms of the scrutiny that they provide for Government.

Before the intervention from the hon. Member for Banff and Buchan, I was trying to make the point that, under strict proportionality, the smaller parties are not hard done by. If anything, they are slightly over-represented on the breadth of Committees that sit in the House. That does not mean to say, as I made clear, that the Government are not sensitive to the points that have been made repeatedly this evening, which I am sure have been heard by my hon. Friend who chairs the Committee of Selection.

Having said that, I hope that the hon. Member for North Tayside will not press his amendment to a vote, which he has indicated that he does not intend to do. I commend the motion to the House. If the amendment is pressed to a vote, I hope that the House will reject it.

Pete Wishart: I beg to ask leave to withdraw the amendment.

Amendment, by leave, withdrawn.

Ordered,

That Mr John Hayes be discharged from the Committee of Selection and Mr Peter Luff be added to the Committee.

6.35 pm

Sitting suspended.

Fire Dispute

On resuming—

6.50 pm

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State (Mr. John Prescott): With permission, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would like to make another statement on the fire service pay dispute. I apologise to the House for making this statement when matters are still unresolved, but the House does not sit tomorrow and I undertook to keep Members informed. The strike is still planned to take place tomorrow morning at 9 o'clock. It has not been called off, and I thought it appropriate to make a statement to the House as it is not sitting tomorrow.

My previous statement on 14 November informed the House of the events leading up to the two-day firefighters, strike from 13 to 15 November. Since then my right hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and the Regions and I have had numerous meetings with the Fire Brigades Union, the employers and Sir George Bain in order to bring them back to the negotiating table. The negotiations are a matter for the employers and the unions, but our latest information is that the negotiations are still continuing, as the Fire Brigades Union has just returned to them.

The employers have released some details of their pay offer. It amounts to a pay increase of 16 per cent. over two years linked to modernisation. This would give a qualified firefighter a basic salary in the region of £25,000 a year by November 2003. It is not true to say, as many people are saying on television, that the offer is limited to 4 per cent. There have been a number of questions about funding. I have repeatedly made it clear to the House that any pay in addition to the original 4 per cent. offer has to be linked to modernisation. The independent review headed by Sir George Bain has given us the route map in its position paper published on 11 November. The full report will be available in about three weeks' time.

I call on the Fire Brigades Union to engage constructively on the modernisation agenda. The FBU has made it clear that it wants a substantial pay increase. Sir George Bain has shown that a substantial pay increase can be funded by substantial modernisation. We want a fair deal for the firefighters, but we also want a fair deal for the public whom they serve. The House is well aware of the original 40 per cent. pay claim made by the FBU—that a claim I remind the House is still on the table. No Government could fund a pay increase on that scale. It would put at risk the economic stability that we have worked so hard to achieve.

The knock-on effect of a settlement on the scale demanded by the FBU would be less money to invest in public services and public sector workers; it would be unfair on other groups who also do vital jobs and have accepted smaller wage increases linked to modernisation; and it would lead to higher interest rates and mortgages. I am sure that all hon. Members will join me when I say that nobody wants this strike.

Of course, if the strike does go ahead tomorrow morning, we will do everything we can to protect public safety, based on the best operational advice from the military, police and senior fire officers. None the less, as we have always made clear, the military will be providing an emergency, not a replacement, service. We all need to be vigilant during the strike, but it is also imperative that our cover is not stretched by hoax calls. Such calls put lives at risk. Anyone found to have made a hoax call will be dealt with as quickly and severely as possible.

In these circumstances it is the Government's responsibility to do all he can to protect public safety. Our plans will be kept under constant review. When it comes to saving lives, no option can be ruled out. Any strike by the union would be damaging and dangerous. It would put lives at risk. The two-day strike was wrong and dangerous, as I made clear at the time. An eight-day strike would be even more so.

The 40 per cent. claim for which the FBU is fighting is unjustified. If the union is serious about resolving the matter, it should continue the talks about pay in exchange for changing outdated work practices, but it must understand that it will not get one without the other. The country must understand that the Government will not give into claims that are unreasonable and which would have had a detrimental impact on the economy. We govern for the whole country and we will exercise our responsibilities for the whole country. Our responsibilities are to the economy and to people's jobs, mortgages and living standards. Our responsibilities are to ensure the safety of the public and to prevent the unnecessary loss of life. It is that thought that has motivated me and my right hon. Friend in the past few days in our efforts to keep people talking, not walking. Lives are saved every day a strike is cancelled. Even at this late stage, I want to call on the Fire Brigades Union to continue negotiating and call off the eight-day strike due to start at 9 o'clock tomorrow morning. In the wider management of the economy, we must be fair to the factory workers, shop workers and office workers and be absolutely clear that we want an agreement between the firefighters and employers.

We have to be fair to all—to nurses, teachers, ambulance workers and the police. We cannot and will not accept rises for firefighters that are unfair to others, so I say to the Fire Brigades Union: call off the strike, stay at the negotiating table and work out a deal that is fair to the firefighters and fair to all.

I promise to keep the House informed. My message again to the Fire Brigades Union is talk, do not walk.

David Davis (Haltemprice and Howden): I thank the Deputy Prime Minister for his statement and for his prior notification of it. I understand the circumstances that required it to be made quite late. May I also associate the Opposition with his call on the Fire Brigades Union to reach a settlement at this late stage?

While we all hope that there is a last-minute settlement, it now seems extremely likely that tomorrow's strike will go ahead. It is quite simply unacceptable that people's lives should be put at risk in that way. I wish to state in the clearest possible terms that such action by the Fire Brigades Union is unnecessary, unacceptable and wrong. It is the action of the 1970s and not the 21st century. It is saddening that after months of negotiations there still remain more questions than answers with regard to this sorry dispute. However, at this late hour, our concern must focus on ensuring the safety of the public over the week ahead.

[David Davis]

For the next eight days, it is likely that fire cover in this country will be provided by military personnel. Last week, the Home Office Minister Lord Falconer said:

"If public safety ultimately requires that the Army crosses picket lines to get the red fire engines, then that is what will have to be done".

Yesterday, the Chief of the Defence Staff said:

"The armed forces should not cross picket lines".

Will the Deputy Prime Minister now clarify this issue? What is the Government's position? If there is an opportunity for Army personnel to use modern firefighting equipment, should they cross the picket line to get it or not? I also understand that the Association of Chief Police Officers has said that policemen should not cross picket lines. What is the Government's response to that?

From the start, we have called on the Government to give the military access to modern fire engines. Last time we debated the subject, I asked the Deputy Prime Minister to make use of 400 modern reserve fire engines available around the country to train military personnel with modern equipment. We now understand that some 15 fire engines have been made available for training. That is too little, too late. What actions have been taken dramatically to increase the availability of red fire engines to military personnel? Is it true that one authority has refused to supply any reserve fire engines for use by the military, and what action is he taking to deal with that?

The Deputy Prime Minister tells us that he is seeking an agreement with the Fire Brigades Union to ensure that it will provide assistance in the event of a major incident. We strongly support him in that and urge the Fire Brigades Union to sign that agreement tonight. Has he established any command and control responsibility to make any necessary response both rapid and effective?

I asked him when he made his last statement about the fact that on 25 October the Attorney-General's Department wrote that it was still considering whether to use section 240 of the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992 to seek an injunction to stop the strike on the grounds that it put the public at risk of death or injury. Now that the risk is dramatically increased, with the likelihood of the start of an eight-day strike, is the Attorney-General going to seek an injunction tonight in the courts?

During last week's 48-hour strike, commuters throughout London suffered disruption as a result not only of the closure of tube stations, but of unofficial stoppages by a reported 350 tube drivers. Union leaders such as Mr. Bob Crow have suggested that they may stop work again for the duration of a strike, citing health and safety issues. What action is the Deputy Prime Minister taking to ensure that that does not happen, and what he would do if it happened?

What is the Government's position on pay? Is it, as the Prime Minister's official spokesman said, that

"the envelope is sealed and it's not going to be opened"?

Is it, as the Chancellor said, that

"we would not tolerate inflationary pay settlements that undermine economic discipline"?

Or is it, as the Deputy Prime Minister said, that the Government are

"quite prepared to make an exceptional case"

for the firefighters?

The process has been prolonged and made worse by confused and contradictory messages. The country needs clear guidance and firm government on such a critical issue.

The Deputy Prime Minister: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his words of support at the beginning of his contribution. I agree, and made it clear in my statement, that any strike will mean the threat of loss of life. We are all worried about that, and we all have a responsibility, especially the Government, to ensure that that does not happen. However, we must remember that we are not yet in a strike situation. Matters are sufficiently serious for me to come to the House to say that a strike is a possibility tomorrow, but every one of us hopes that it will not happen, and that negotiations will continue and lead to an agreement. *[Interruption.]* Yes, there are only a few hours left, but I am trying to keep hon. Members as well informed as I can. If the House were sitting until 10 pm, perhaps we would not have to make a judgment about whether to make a statement now. However, I shall not tempt the Deputy Speaker, who has been generous in giving me an opportunity to make the statement.

Let me deal with the right hon. Gentleman's specific points. The 400 appliances to which he referred are the total number. Some have no engines, some have no wheels and others need repairing. However, 27 are immediately available, and more than 100 extra will be available to the command structure. In some cases, there may be a better way of dealing with specific incidents.

I remind the right hon. Gentleman that the military is worried about its soldiers and believes that the best method of training is with the simple technology on the green goddess. I am sure that he agrees that I must leave it to the judgment of the armed services. It is not therefore necessary for some invading force to go to fire stations. Several FBU members in different areas have said that the armed services can have the engines; they do not want a dispute about that.

The amount of training that is required before the engines can be used is another constraint. It is not currently a problem, but the Prime Minister has said that we shall take whatever actions are necessary to ensure public safety. The armed services did an excellent job with just over 1,000 vehicles, compared with approximately 3,000 under normal circumstances. They dealt with all the calls. The public co-operated through reducing calls by a third, but we are generally maintaining adequate cover.

We have already established that normal command control will apply in the emergency circumstances to which the right hon. Gentleman referred. The fire service, the military and the police will be involved in such incidents, as happens under normal circumstances.

Hon. Members will recall that I previously failed to reach agreement with the FBU. I was therefore not prepared to make an announcement because I simply did not have an agreement. Both sides have subsequently thrashed out an agreement. The employers, the Government and the FBU support it, and it has been

passed by FBU lawyers. It is waiting to be signed and, like the right hon. Gentleman, I hope that the FBU will sign it tonight.

The right hon. Gentleman was right about the Attorney-General. I have held several meetings with him. Of course, we have discussed public interest and public safety. His responsibility is making the legal judgment, mine is to advise him about whether his actions would make it more difficult to intervene, and whether everything is being done to enable him to justify any actions to a court before which he might appear. He has the power to apply for an injunction. It is up to him to make that independent judgment. It is up to me to advise him about whether such action would inflame the dispute and make matters more difficult. At the end of the day, if such actions prolonged the strike, the threat to public safety would be even greater. It is his judgment, however, and I give him advice. It is far better to keep people talking than to seek action in the courts, because that would inflame the situation. That is not a judgment for me, however, but for the Attorney-General.

On the union leaders, my mate Bob Crow—I am bound to say that I do not have a friendly attitude every time I hear his name—has constantly complained that everything that we do is about safety, but that is a proper concern to have. Some of the drivers' actions in relation to the fire dispute, however, were unjustified. London Underground has made that clear and there have been discussions between the Department of Transport and us on that. Let us wait and see what happens on the next occasion. The employers have made it clear that the action of certain staff was unacceptable. The people who should make judgments about safety are the members of the independent body that the House set up: the Health and Safety Commission. It is not an employer or a trade union. It makes the judgments, and it has made it clear that the services in question are safe to operate, so I hope that the union members in that industry will take that into account.

On the right hon. Gentleman's final point about inflation and pay, what can be afforded out of the available resources is the pay offer: 4 per cent. That is what has been offered. In the agreement that I have seen—we shall have to wait to see whether it will be agreed to—that figure relates to November just gone. Next November, the firefighters would get another 3.5 per cent., so 7.5 per cent. would be funded by the authorities themselves. The dispute appears to be about something like 7 per cent. We have made it absolutely clear that any increased payment has to be connected to modernisation. The Bain report has shown that it is possible to modernise the fire service. That is our position. We do not support claims that will be inflationary, nor claims that appear to be based on the idea that people can challenge the Government and, if they are pretty tough, get away with it.

Kate Hoey (Vauxhall): The Deputy Prime Minister will know that modernisation in the Palace of Westminster was not linked to the payment of Members of Parliament. Why cannot the fire dispute be settled by looking at pay first and, afterwards, discussing in a longer-term way the changes to practice that may be necessary, as they are in all sorts of jobs? The changes here were not linked to our pay.

The Deputy Prime Minister: My hon. Friend has overlooked one simple fact. We had an independent inquiry to decide the issues here, which is precisely what I wanted for the fire workers. We set up such an inquiry, despite their not wanting it. That is an essential point. The inquiry made a judgment and that is what we are trying to operate on at the moment. If my hon. Friend is saying that we should be in the situation in which the firemen say, "What is the worth of a fireman? We believe it is £30,000", who makes the judgment about the worth of a nurse? Does he or she walk out of the wards and use that pressure to get a pay increase? No, that is neither acceptable nor fair. Our judgment is that we have to be fair. Where there is disagreement, we appoint an inquiry. That is what we did for the MPs, and that is precisely what we have done for the firemen.

Mr. Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton): We are grateful for the statement from the Deputy Prime Minister, particularly at this grave hour, and for his giving us advance notice of it, given the changing situation. While he rightly holds out a hope that, even at this late stage, the FBU will agree to some sort of deal, does he not agree that the British public will simply not understand it if the union goes ahead with the strike, given the very generous 16 per cent. pay deal that is now on the table? Does it not increasingly appear that the FBU is setting its face against real reform, and that the strikes are no longer about pay but about modernisation?

On funding, will the right hon. Gentleman make it clear that, if the FBU had accepted the pay and reform deal offered by the employers, the Government would have been prepared to provide the necessary transitional funding both to secure the vital modernisation and to avoid these dangerous and damaging strikes? Finally, now that the police have joined the armed forces in arguing that officers should not be forced to cross picket lines, will the Deputy Prime Minister assure the House that the emergency arrangements for an eight-day strike are in place and are genuinely robust enough? Will he assure the House that the advice of the police and the military commanders will be kept under review, in case there are life-threatening situations that demand the use of equipment that is held at the fire stations?

The Deputy Prime Minister: It is true that the offer that has been made by the employers—we shall wait to see what comes out of the final negotiations—was, indeed, 16 per cent. That is their judgment, but I think they feel that they cannot finance all that 16 per cent. The Bain inquiry showed that the remaining part—over and above what the employers were offering—could be financed by modernisation. The union is making it clear that it does not want the modernisation on any terms. Given those circumstances, there is no argument about whether we are financing 16 per cent. or not. The union must start the process of negotiation.

The other factor I have had to consider is that it is difficult to get accurate information from the local authority employers as to exactly what we are saving or what the costs are. That is one problem that I have had

[Mr. Edward Davey]

and why I asked the Bain inquiry to give me its advice. At the moment, if the FBU sets its face against the concept of modernisation and does not accept it, even though nurses, teachers and all sorts of workers have accepted it, we have to say clearly, "You are not going to get that lump sum of money on the table without any negotiations on modernisation." As to whether the Government give anything, we have to make a judgment as to what the authorities would say. Bain tells us, "You can save the money." I shall wait to see what comes out of their negotiations.

We have taken all the necessary action to ensure that all the necessary measures are in place to deal with the circumstances of an eight-day strike. I shall not kid the hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey): an eight-day strike is more difficult to deal with than one of 48 hours, but I was pleased with how the armed services reacted to the last strike. They did an excellent job and that gives me encouragement, but we have no doubt about the fact that it would be far better to have a full fire service rather than a green goddess service. That is an important point.

As to whether the police and the Army should be crossing picket lines, they have not been asked to do that in those circumstances. I note what is in the ACPO statement tonight—the police will not be involved. I do not know how that comes about, because they were pretty well involved in the miners' strike. They did not have any arguments about that.

Mr. Kevin Hughes (Doncaster, North): May I first congratulate my right hon. Friend and my right hon. Friend the Minister for Local Government and the Regions on the time and effort that they are putting into trying to resolve the dispute?

About this time last week, there were hints from the FBU that 16 per cent. would do it, and I went out to meet the local firefighters on the picket line in my constituency last Friday and they hinted that 16 per cent. would do it. They have now been offered that 16 per cent., which is about seven or eight times more than inflation. It is a fantastic offer. Does the Deputy Prime Minister agree that it is time for the FBU leadership to put that offer to the membership and call off the strike?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I must be absolutely clear about the matter of the 16 per cent. Even on the deal being discussed at the moment, the local authorities say that they cannot fund it. During the negotiations earlier in the year, those authorities made it clear that they had no money and would not advance beyond their initial offer. In this deal, they have made a 16 per cent. offer, but they are making it clear that they cannot afford it. We have made it clear that any extra moneys that have to be found over and above the resources available to the authorities must be found through modernisation.

We have not adopted any position on the agreement—we will have to wait and see what comes out—but it should be clear that anything over and above what the local authorities have the resources to fund must be financed out of modernisation. All the fire people should consider the truth of that, because there is an awful lot of news manipulation going on. One reason why I am giving this advice to the House is that people who were watching the television would think that 4 per cent. was all that had been offered, although the negotiations were still going on. That seems to be a sophisticated manipulation of news.

I hope that the people in the fire union take into account all that is being offered before they arrive at their judgment.

Mr. Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton): Even if there is some modernisation, there is no way that that will immediately convert into the hard cash necessary to pay for higher salaries, and the Deputy Prime Minister should stop hiding behind that myth and pretending that the Bain report says that modernisation will deliver the money. The Chancellor has said that he is not prepared to pay either, so what calculation has the Deputy Prime Minister made of the average council tax increase needed to pay for each additional 1 per cent. in firefighters' pay?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I do not have to make that calculation, because I will accept what George Bain has said. He has done a thorough report, and his final report comes out in three weeks. I hope that the hon. Gentleman has read the report. He will see in the appendices that Bain highlights the changes that are necessary to make. There is an important distinction to be made here. His offer was over two years—whatever period is offered is an important negotiating factor—but basically he has shown clearly that that amount of money can be saved to pay for this kind of deal. He said, "Do all this modernisation, pay 4 per cent. to begin with and then pay 7 per cent." That is how he advocated the 11 per cent. agreement. I do not have to look in the crystal ball; I look at the inquiry. That is why we set it up and we have its recommendation.

John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington): I thank the Deputy Prime Minister for keeping the House informed. I apologise for missing his previous statements; I know he was anxious about that, being fastidious about my concern.

During the week the FBU has moved dramatically on both pay and modernisation. Only this evening, it has clearly stated its willingness to negotiate on shift patterns. The employers have also moved. I think we breathed a sigh of relief today in the hope that the 16 per cent. offer would materialise and resolve the dispute, but the employers said this morning that even their modernisation proposals would not produce the money to fund that offer. There is a budget gap, and, as the employers' leader said this morning, another partner is needed in the negotiations—the Government.

The union has moved. The employers have moved. The employers have said that even the Bain proposals will not cover the costs of the dispute. They—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. The hon. Gentleman must put a succinct question rather than engaging in a peroration.

John McDonnell: Let me finish the question, then. If the unions and the employers have moved, why cannot the Government move?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I thank my hon. Friend for what he had to say. He was the man who called for

me to apologise for misleading the House. What he said was totally untrue, as he would have found if he had checked the facts with the trade union or anyone else. We did not interfere with the deal earlier, as I told the House. I note that my hon. Friend did not apologise for what he said, but I want to put it on record.

As for whether the union has moved, it has not withdrawn its 40 per cent. claim. There is a lot of talk in the papers that it might accept 16 per cent. or 20 per cent. That is a good basis for negotiation, but, whatever is in the papers, I do not know what the union will finally settle for. I shall wait and see. I hear what the union says to me about modernisation, however. It says that it does not want to deal with change in the rigid shift system, that it does not want a block on full-time firefighters' working with their retained colleagues, that it is against using defibrillators and that it is against a ban on joint control rooms. What I find odd is that some brigades in some areas are already doing those things. Why is this such a matter of principle for the unions nationally? Why can they not accept practices that already taking place in some parts of the country? In fact, I do not ask them to accept those practices, but will they please start negotiating? That is all I ask. Negotiating is far better than walking away and increasing the risk to our citizens. Modernisation is the key, and the basis on which I will make a judgment.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire): The Deputy Prime Minister said a few moments ago that the police had had no problems crossing the picket line during the miners' strike. That is wholly inaccurate, and I hope he will withdraw the slur on the police. The police ensured that those who wanted to cross a picket line in order to go about their lawful business could do so. The slur that the Deputy Prime Minister has cast is unworthy of his office.

How has the Deputy Prime Minister enabled the situation to reach this stage, given that most firemen do not know what is being offered to them at this moment?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I am sorry that I cannot tell the House exactly what has been agreed and what is on offer, although statements have been made by various people on television. I told the House at the outset that I did not know the facts, but I thought it wanted to be reassured about what we are doing to deal with the strike that may occur tomorrow. I always promised the House that I would keep it informed, and that is what I am trying to do.

I cannot provide all the information that I would like to provide, and I am sorry about that, but let me make one thing clear. The question relating to the police was whether they had authority to enforce the law. I referred to the miners because in that instance they were trying to enforce the law, although it might have been controversial. I suppose that if anyone had to go into fire stations and remove vehicles, the police would follow the same principles despite the difficult circumstances. What they would probably not want to do is drive the vehicles out themselves, which they would not normally be expected to do. I am sure that those who did so in such circumstances—although to my mind it would be completely unnecessary—would have the protection of the law.

Donald Anderson (Swansea, East): My right hon. Friend has rightly said some very strong things about hoax callers who anger the public, and who can only add to the enormous dangers. Is he satisfied with the sentencing powers available to the courts, and will he try to ensure that the message goes out loudly to sentencers that some exemplary sentences would be a very good thing, and very popular with the public?

The Deputy Prime Minister: There are difficulties with this issue, and we have referred to them on other occasions. We wholly condemn hoax callers, and hopefully the number of such calls might fall off in the next few days—if there is a strike.

On enforcement, the courts have plenty of powers to deal with such incidents. In one incident that was referred to—it may have been in Scotland—the person responsible was found immediately, but he was released on bail for three or four weeks while reports were compiled. Perhaps all of us felt that such an opportunity should have been denied by opposing bail, thereby showing that the offence was considered serious. The powers exist, and magistrates and court authorities should take note that we believe this to be a serious matter even under normal circumstances, but that, under these extraordinary circumstances, they should be tougher.

Mr. Peter Luff (Mid-Worcestershire): The Deputy Prime Minister referred frequently to soldiers and the Army during his statement. Occasionally, he corrected himself by referring to the armed services, but will he remind the House that the Navy, in particular, is making a significant contribution during this dispute? Increased pressures, cancellation of leave, uncertainty, the compromising of operational objectives—such as those of the south Atlantic patrol ship, which is moored in Portsmouth, rather than protecting the Falkland Islands—and the protection of the public demand that the Government do more than is being done, to judge by the answer given to my right hon. Friend the Member for Haltemprice and Howden (David Davis), to ensure that the armed services have access to proper firefighting equipment.

The Deputy Prime Minister: I certainly do not want to give the impression that I am unaware of the situation. The hon. Gentleman is right to say that I did stray into referring to the Army, and that the armed services in general are involved. I properly record this House's appreciation of the work that they have done. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] Although less than 10 per cent. of the forces are involved, that is still quite important. We have heard the comments of defence spokesmen, and we will seek to strike a proper balance to meet the requirements of our armed forces. We are extremely grateful for their help during the circumstances of a firefighters' strike. There is no doubt that they are under stress and strain, but on meeting them they come across as remarkably cheerful and committed to helping communities. That is what we have always come to expect from our armed services, along with giving effective military assistance when called on to do so. They enjoy the confidence of this House, and we are grateful for their actions.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover): Does my right hon. Friend agree that most strikes are finally settled around

[Mr. Dennis Skinner]

a negotiating table? There have been a few exceptions, but generally speaking that is what matters. Does he also agree that, while Bain has put forward some important modernisation proposals, the union could well come forward with modernisation proposals of its own? In fact, it already has done so, and although those proposals have not been costed yet, they could be. Is he aware, for instance, that in Derbyshire a pilot scheme already exists, through which the ambulance station and the fire station operate together? Let us assume that that could be rolled out nationally. Would that be advantageous, and could it be costed? If the union's own modernisation schemes—I hope that he will answer this point—which have already been tried in certain parts of Britain, were rolled out, could that be a part-solution to the problem?

The Deputy Prime Minister: My hon. Friend makes some very sensible points. I encouraged the union to bring its modernisation proposals to the table, and it did so. However, I should point out that the proposals involve expanding the service, using more modern engines, and going out into the community to explain how to reduce fire risk. Those are the things that a modern service should properly be doing, but that does little to address the question of conditions of work and the delivery of service. Both issues have to be addressed, and the various proposals on modernisation—including the FBU's alternative proposals—need to come together. The issue is not just about wages and conditions; it is about having a modern emergency service that meets the requirements of communities. Both aspects should be very much to the fore.

I note with interest that a pilot scheme in my hon. Friend's area puts together the fire service, the ambulance service and the police in a common control room. The FBU is totally opposed to that because it does not consider it modern practice. Curiously enough, during such strikes we do have a common control room, which works very well. If the FBU cannot accept that proposal, the least that it could do is to negotiate on it.

Mr. Michael Weir (Angus): The Deputy Prime Minister spoke earlier about sophisticated news management. Coming from a new Labour Minister, that was a bit rich. There is now utter confusion about figures. In the course of the statement, the House has heard mention of 4 per cent., 7.5 per cent. and 16 per cent. The Deputy Prime Minister told the hon. Member for West Derbyshire (Mr. McLoughlin) that he was not sure what was on the table. Will he confirm what is being offered? Are the employers willing to offer 16 per cent? What would the Government contribute to settle the strike?

The Deputy Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman has clearly not been reading much about the situation. We all agree that the FBU, in Scotland as well as England, is asking for 16 per cent. That has not changed. Bain proposed that 11 per cent. could be paid, with modernisation. The employers have come up with various proposals. The one currently on the table is for 16 per cent., under certain circumstances. That is why the figures differ.

I try to give the House as much information as possible. I arrived at a figure of 7.5 per cent. in the following way: the 4 per cent. will be for one year, 2002; another 3.5 per cent. has been agreed as the annual payment, with the remainder to be paid for by modernisation. In those circumstances, that takes us up to 16 per cent. We must therefore ensure that whatever agreement is arrived at is agreed by both parties.

I have just been given a note, the latest report from the front. It says that the offer is still 4 per cent., according to the FBU general secretary, that the strike is almost certainly on, but that the general secretary's telephone will be on all night. In any case, I hope that both sides keep talking and find agreement. If they do not, I have made clear my view about how to deal with the matter.

Mr. Peter Pike (Burnley): Does my right hon. Friend agree that strikes never solve any problems? Should not a simple message be sent to the firefighters to the effect that, regardless of the varying degrees of sympathy and support that have been expressed in the House, they should call off the strike? They should negotiate, and settle the dispute at around 16 per cent., with modernisation. Is not that the way forward? Should not that be the united message from the House to all firefighters?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, although I hesitate about saying that strikes do not have a role or that they cannot influence some situations. The sad fact is that strikes will not always be won on the day that they commence. There is nothing wonderful about striking and losing after a period of time. It is far better to have an inquiry and an intelligent discussion, with both sides trying to come together in agreement.

I repeat that the employers are offering 16 per cent., which I believe should be paid for through modernisation. If a strike is called, it will be about modernisation, not pay.

Mr. John Randall (Uxbridge): The news is clearly desperately disappointing. I hope that, even now, the FBU will retreat from the brink and consult its rank and file membership, as other hon. Members have suggested. The Deputy Prime Minister will be aware that, if the strike goes ahead, it will cover a weekend for which many public events will have been organised. Will the right hon. Gentleman's Department, or any other, give advice to the organisers of public events, and to those who might wish to attend them?

The Deputy Prime Minister: We first gave advice about public events in relation to Guy Fawke's night, 5 November, and the weekend either side. We are concerned about that matter. We have a public information campaign and are giving advice to all bodies involved in events. We will continue to do so, even under the circumstances that I have described.

Mr. Harry Barnes (North-East Derbyshire): We will never reach a settlement if we follow the proposals of the Opposition. That will lead only to the destruction of all contending parties in the dispute. Does my right hon. Friend agree that the best hope is to hold negotiations that involve him and the FBU directly? Should he not

pick up the telephone tonight, and have a discussion about modernisation as well as pay? As well as the Bain proposals, the FBU has its own proposals that could be developed, extended and worked out.

The Deputy Prime Minister: I understand what my hon. Friend says, but neither the FBU general secretary nor I have been slow in picking up the phone and talking. Many exchanges have gone on. The difficulty is no longer one of communication, but of accepting that modernisation should be part of any agreement. The union has made it clear that it should not, and it has rejected—savagely and, in my view, wrongly—the results of the independent inquiry held by Bain. The way to settle the dispute is to have the will to do so and to sit around the table. I was pleased that the Fire Brigades Union came back to the negotiating table because ultimately it has to be settled by talking, not walking.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. In this evolving situation, I imagine that the Deputy Prime Minister needs to be back in his office to keep in touch. I propose to call two more hon. Members from either side.

Mr. Eric Forth (Bromley and Chislehurst): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Could you clarify the status of this sitting to the House, since we are now past the time when the House was scheduled to sit without passing a resolution to that effect? Could you confirm, therefore, that there is no necessary limit to the time during which the House can sit at this stage? Could you also confirm that it would be possible for you to suspend the sitting yet further to allow the Deputy Prime Minister to come back at, say, 10 o'clock, as he indicated he would like to do, to bring the House up to date on further developments? Could you confirm that all those things are perfectly possible, Mr. Deputy Speaker?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The Deputy Prime Minister sought my permission in this particular case—I think that Mr. Speaker may have heard it first but it was confirmed by me—that a statement should be made to bring the House up to date at what nevertheless was an awkward time. It is always possible for other requests to be received, but it may be for the convenience of the House and the better conduct of negotiations of national interest if the Deputy Prime Minister is performing his official duties other than simply those of this House. He has come to the House to report on the dispute but he may have other responsibilities in connection with it that he has to pursue. Therefore, I think it appropriate that at some reasonable point, the proceedings on this statement are terminated.

David Davis: Further to that point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. A significant point arose during the course of the Deputy Prime Minister's responses. He made the clear point earlier that the Attorney-General did not want to intervene for as long as the negotiation was going on. He has now indicated to the House that those negotiations have come to an end, whatever Mr. Gilchrist has said about his telephone still being on. Is it possible for the Solicitor-General to come to the House and give us her view on a material matter in this dispute?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Which Ministers come to the House is a matter for them and not for the Chair. I do not believe that it would be for the convenience of the House or the people who serve us for the sitting to be suspended to an indefinite time. I cannot believe that that is right. The Deputy Prime Minister has come to the House at the last possible moment before we suspend for the weekend, and I think that that is a reasonable balance. I now propose to take two hon. Members from either side before we move on to the next business.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire): In agreeing with most of what the right hon. Gentleman said, may I ask him to clarify the position regarding the Bain report? He quoted from it a number of times with approval, and one agrees with that, but then said that it will not be available for three weeks. What, precisely, will not be available for three weeks and what, precisely, is available now?

The Deputy Prime Minister: I am sorry if I misled the House on that. The Bain inquiry will, I hope, give its full report in mid-December. On 5 November I asked whether, in view of the circumstances, it could produce another report to take the threatened strike into account. Sir George Bain produced a position paper on where modernisation could be introduced, saving resources and paying towards the modernisation of the fire service. The final report will be available in mid-December.

Mr. Robert N. Wareing (Liverpool, West Derby): Does my right hon. Friend realise that the public will be mystified that the Government cannot make at least some financial contribution towards the settlement of the dispute, particularly when they believe that the Government are preparing to spend God knows how many billions of pounds on a war in Iraq?

The Deputy Prime Minister: Perhaps I can let my hon. Friend into a secret—they are using public money. It is called the local financial settlement, and is used in the 4 per cent. deal. As for whether any more resources should be available, I have made it absolutely clear that that has to be linked to modernisation. I do not think that the public are in any doubt about that—nurses, teachers and doctors have all gone along with various modernisation proposals to get their wages. They do not believe that it would be right just to give the money to the Fire Brigades Union without any conditions.

Mr. Graham Brady (Altrincham and Sale, West): What steps has the right hon. Gentleman taken to ensure that modern appliances, with trained crews and modern rescue equipment, are available in all our major urban centres and adjacent to all our main transport facilities and transport routes?

The Deputy Prime Minister: As I said, even with the extra facilities of about 120 appliances, we shall not have the 3,000 vehicles that are available for normal service. We are ensuring that every region has a number of those vehicles; it will then be up to the emergency control centres to decide where and how they are sent, so I leave that to their good judgment.

[Lynne Jones]

Lynne Jones (Birmingham, Selly Oak): When MPs' salaries were reviewed, a thorough analysis was undertaken of the way in which our jobs had changed by contrast with comparative professions. I have read the Bain interim report and it is clear that no such analysis has been undertaken of the fundamental element of the firefighters' claim. We all want the strike to be called off, even at this late hour. The firefighters have moved. Is it not time that the employers were allowed to move from the 4 per cent. now, take it or leave it position?

The Deputy Prime Minister: Let me make it clear: the employers' resources have to cover all local authority workers—I know that my hon. Friend will be extremely concerned about all such workers in her constituency—who have just settled for a two-year deal of less than 4 per cent. a year. Would they not feel angry if 40 per cent. was given to the firefighters without an agreement? The nurses' agreement will soon take place. There will be all sorts of agreements and my hon. Friend will fight for each of them, but she is not paying for them. We have to find a solution.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I seek your guidance on the vexed question of written ministerial statements, yet again. Today, the Order Paper included notice of a ministerial statement from the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, who is in the Chamber this evening. The statement is brief. It states:

"My right hon. and noble Friend the Lord Chancellor has today announced that he has placed copies of the Codes of Practice under sections 45 and 46 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 in the Libraries of both Houses."

That is not true. The Library knows nothing of those codes of practice. That is not a satisfactory procedure for the Department and it is hardly in line with freedom of information. Is there anything that you can do to assist, Mr. Deputy Speaker?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman may not have noticed the ruling given by Mr. Speaker yesterday. Mr. Speaker pointed out that the statements

"have only to be printed in *Hansard*. That is the rule."—[*Official Report*, 20 November 2002; Vol. 394, c. 646.]

The basis of the hon. Gentleman's question appears to be incorrect.

Mr. Heath: Further to that point of order, I am grateful to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. My argument is not that the statement was made incorrectly—it was available in the Library and will indeed be printed in *Hansard*; it is that it is an incorrect statement because it says that something has been placed in the Library but it has not. Given that the matter relates to freedom of information, that seems most unfortunate.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: If the statement has been printed in *Hansard*, it should be available in the Library. If it is not available, that should be examined. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman's point has been heard. We are in the early days of these written statements and I hope that some of these little difficulties can be overcome quickly.

Mr. Barry Gardiner (Brent, North): On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I seek your guidance. In the course of the statement that we have just heard, the shadow Leader of the House and the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden (David Davis) made points of order. Will you advise the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker, whether it is proper to make a point of order during a statement?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I accepted the point of order because it was obviously connected with the statement that was taking place at the time.

Sutton Coldfield Magistrates Court

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—*[Mr. Ainger.]*

7.39 pm

Mr. Andrew Mitchell (Sutton Coldfield): I am grateful to the House and to Mr. Speaker for giving me this opportunity to raise the grave concerns felt in my constituency and throughout north Birmingham about the possible closure of Sutton Coldfield magistrates court. I record my thanks to the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department and her officials for the courteous way in which they have dealt with me during the past two months. They met me some months ago to discuss how the matter could be resolved. The Minister also generously gave her time last week to meet a delegation from Birmingham, and she is responding to this debate. I understand that she is to be congratulated on winning an award today as the Minister to watch. I certainly congratulate her on that, and assure her that she will be watched most carefully in Sutton Coldfield and north Birmingham as she tries to conclude this matter.

With the permission of the House authorities, Madam Deputy Speaker, I hope on Tuesday 3 December to table a petition signed by no fewer than 5,000 people from north Birmingham. That, too, underlines the gravity of the matter as viewed from north Birmingham. The signatures on the petition were collected extremely rapidly, and I pay tribute in particular to the *Sutton Coldfield Observer*, one of our two local newspapers, which recently won the national award of the best free newspaper of the year. I congratulate it on the staunch stand that it has taken in defence of this most important local interest.

In Birmingham the political establishment agrees on almost nothing, and there are divisions within the political groups on almost everything that one can imagine. It is true that there are no divisions among Conservative Members of Parliament in Birmingham, but that, alas, is because I am the only one who represents the Birmingham conurbation—at the moment. However, I am tonight supported by the hon. Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Mr. Simon), and I am most grateful to him. On this matter he is certainly my hon. Friend, and I will even forgive him for his rude article about my constituents in *The Spectator*. I should advise hon. Members with long memories that, as they may recall, *The Spectator* is a somewhat faded coffee-table publication with a good wine column towards the back.

All nine of the hard-working Sutton Coldfield councillors, and those throughout Birmingham city council, are unanimously opposed to the proposal to close Sutton Coldfield magistrates court. Such utter unanimity of view is unheard of. The council is the paying authority, hence its appeal to the Lord Chancellor's Department.

I have read the many debates that have taken place on court closures, and I fully understand the Minister's position tonight. She cannot say very much, but I hope that she will be able to tell us a little about the process of the appeal, and in particular how long she anticipates that it will take before she and her officials will be able to pronounce judgment, and whether any more written evidence for our case would be helpful to her Department.

Debates have been secured by the hon. Members for Braintree (Mr. Hurst) and for Kingston and Surbiton (Mr. Davey) and my hon. Friend the Member for Westbury (Dr. Murrison), all of whom raised the same important matters in respect of their areas. Each case bears some similarity to the one that I am putting, but I believe that the case for keeping the Sutton Coldfield court open is much stronger than those that the House has previously heard.

The proposal by the West Midlands magistrates courts committee to close the court in Sutton Coldfield is a dreadful mistake, and I hope that the debate will play a part in convincing the Minister of that view. Accompanied by the hon. Member for Birmingham, Erdington, representatives of the local bench and Birmingham city council, and Her Majesty's coroner for Birmingham and Solihull, I recently met the Minister, as I said, to outline the objections to the proposed closure. The meeting was useful and demonstrated the widespread cross-party support for the court and against the committee's proposal.

The current courthouse was built in 1956 and was refurbished and extended in the 1980s. It is adjacent to the police station and the many other offices and bodies that serve the infrastructure of a court location. Since the 1980s, almost nothing has been spent on routine redecoration or cyclical maintenance, so that today it is accepted that the court needs work to improve its appearance, but the basic fabric of the building is sound.

The committee has cited that chronic lack of investment as a reason for regarding the courthouse as unsuitable. Yet the committee is the body responsible for determining which buildings receive investment over the years. By consistently withholding money for maintenance, it has ensured that the building appears neglected. It is 11 years since it was repainted, yet the committee rejected out of hand an informal offer from the local magistrates to provide their labour to repaint areas of the court, if the committee would just provide the paint. It says something about the character and commitment of those in our local magistracy that they should have made that offer and sought to proceed in that way.

In the summer of this year, some £250,000 was spent on providing new cell accommodation at the rear of the existing courthouse. Those new cells, together with the new interview room facilities for solicitors and new kitchen facilities, greatly improve the utility of the existing courthouse. I have today accepted an invitation formally to open those enhancements to Sutton Coldfield's court facilities.

There is already a ramp and a lift providing access to the courthouse, and the Lord Chancellor's Department has allocated funds for the works necessary for building compliance. So the basic structure of the courthouse is sound, even though, as I have said, some redecoration is long overdue—and it has been withheld by those who now claim that the appearance of the building is a reason to close it.

It has been argued that because the courthouse is situated in Sutton Coldfield but serves around 100,000 people in the north Birmingham area, there is some

[Mr. Andrew Mitchell]

mismatch between those who form the bench and those to whom they dispense justice. However, the truth is that the bench is drawn from all parts of the community that it serves. The magistrates are drawn both from the leafiest parts of Sutton Coldfield and from the more deprived parts of the adjoining area. The bench is well balanced, and there is no evidence to support the contention that somehow the toffs of Sutton are dispensing justice to the poor of the wider area.

The hon. Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Mr. Simon)—he hopes to catch your eye in a moment, Madam Deputy Speaker—and I are not presenting a partisan case, but a case for retaining that courthouse in north Birmingham. Sutton Coldfield magistrates court extends its administration far beyond Sutton Coldfield, taking in Erdington, Castle Vale and Kingstanding, making it in reality a court centre covering nearly a third of Britain's second city.

It is perfectly clear that for many years that courthouse has been a court centre based in Sutton Coldfield; it is not just Sutton Coldfield's court. Birmingham is the largest metropolitan council area in Britain. It is four times the size of most metropolitan borough councils, so it makes no sense to close down a court that currently handles a third of the city's work load.

There is no problem with recruiting magistrates to serve on the bench in Sutton Coldfield, and it is exceedingly uncommon for a case to be heard by only two magistrates, rather than the normal three. That contrasts markedly with the situation in the existing magistrates court in central Birmingham, where it has been a common occurrence for only two magistrates to sit. The existing courts in central Birmingham already constitute the largest courts centre in Europe.

Approximately half those currently serving as magistrates in Sutton Coldfield have said that if the courthouse were closed, they would not be willing to serve in central Birmingham. That would represent a loss of about 60 experienced magistrates. A loss on that scale will undoubtedly increase the frequency of cases for which only two magistrates are available. The loss of the court will have a profound effect on recruitment to the magistracy.

The five courts at Sutton Coldfield currently operate at around 88 per cent. of their theoretical capacity, compared with a target of 80 per cent. set by the West Midlands magistrates courts committee. I believe that that shows that the arguments about the efficient use of resources are specious. Sutton Coldfield's courthouse deals efficiently with a large number of cases. Each year some 15,000 cases are heard in Sutton Coldfield. Hon. Members will therefore appreciate that not only 15,000 defendants, but more than 15,000 witnesses, solicitors and people from all the other court agencies attend the courthouse. Any proposal to add to the number of people heading for central Birmingham runs contrary to the policies of the Government and Birmingham city council, which aim to reduce the number of journeys made into the already overcrowded city centre, but the potential to add to the traffic congestion is not the only issue.

One feature of the current justice system that the Government say they deem important is that

> "Magistrates are drawn from the local community and it is a great strength of the justice system that members of the community in which defendants and victims live are engaged in its delivery."

I quote from the Parliamentary Secretary's letter, entitled "Justice for All". It would be a tragedy if we lost that fundamental connection in north Birmingham.

The city of Birmingham is home to about 1 million people. It cannot by any stretch of the imagination be seen as a single homogenous community. It contains many separate and distinct communities, one of which lives north of the M6 and is currently served by the Sutton Coldfield magistrates court. As I am sure that the hon. Member for Birmingham, Erdington will explain, his constituents do not look towards the centre of Birmingham, and there is a strong feeling throughout our communities—and much wider than that—that the court should remain in Sutton Coldfield.

The concept of local justice is one of the cornerstones of the magistracy, and it is threatened by proposals to close successful, efficiently run local courts. The specific proposal to build some super-courthouse in central Birmingham, on a site yet to be publicly identified, at a cost that therefore cannot be known, seems to fly in the face of both logic and the Minister's statement, which I quoted a moment ago. At our recent meeting with the Minister, Her Majesty's coroner for Birmingham and Solihull, Mr. Aidan Cotter, made clear his desire to hold weekly sittings in Sutton Coldfield. That desire is based on his recognition that those attending his court would face much less inconvenience and distress if they did not have the added burden of travelling into the city centre.

The existing courthouse in central Birmingham is a grade 1 listed building. It is, I understand, incapable of being expanded to cope with the proposed closure of the Sutton Coldfield court, and is itself in need of works to improve its efficiency. What would the future of that building be were the proposals to proceed? It cannot house more courts, it is not well suited to the technological age in which we live, and it is proposed that its use as a courthouse should cease. Is it to stand mothballed—and at what recurring cost? I know that that is of some concern to Birmingham city council.

The proposal to close Sutton Coldfield's court has met with widespread opposition, not only from local magistrates, Crown Prosecution Service staff who work in Sutton, the police, the youth offending team, solicitors, social services and Birmingham city council, but from nearly 5,000 local residents who have signed the petition to the House that I mentioned earlier.

I urge the Minister to promote local justice and keep Sutton Coldfield's magistrates court open, to cut through the inadequate and often specious arguments of the West Midlands magistrates courts committee, to reject a private finance initiative proposal that is, by common consent, seriously flawed, to hear the unanimous voice of our communities across north Birmingham, to deploy wisdom and judgment in the exercise of her office today, and to throw out such an intellectually inadequate case, which, if accepted, would do such damage to the efficient and effective administration of justice in the north Birmingham area.

7.52 pm

Mr. Siôn Simon (Birmingham, Erdington): I am grateful to you for your indulgence, Madam Deputy Speaker, as I am to the hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr. Mitchell) and the Minister for their generosity with their time.

I shall not detain the House long. The hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield has said pretty much everything that I would have wanted to say—and, I am sure, with far greater eloquence and insight. He mentioned the Minister's accolade of today. Unlike him—I fear that he was rudely snubbed by the hon. Member for Henley (Mr. Johnson), who is the editor of *The Spectator*, and not invited to witness the Minister's great occasion—I was fortunate to be on a table almost directly at her feet as she graciously accepted the first in what will no doubt be a long line of such awards over the years.

My primary purpose in attending the debate is simply to associate myself and my constituents with everything that the hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield has said. This is a truly unique example not just of consensus but of universal agreement across the board. My constituents in Erdington have little love or affection for his constituents in Sutton, whom even he described as toffs. Perhaps I should not describe them as he described them in the meeting the other day—it was an appellation that they would have liked, but which would do little to endear them to my constituents.

As far as I can ascertain, every Birmingham MP, every councillor in my constituency—and, I believe, in that of the hon. Gentleman—all the groups on Birmingham city council and all the thousands of petitioners whom he wishes to bring to the House in a couple of weeks, are unanimous in their opposition to the plan. I have not met a single human being in Birmingham who supports the closure of Sutton Coldfield magistrates court.

As the hon. Gentleman pointed out, we have had meetings with my hon. Friend the Minister. She has heard the arguments already and he has elucidated them with great verve. I will not go on, but merely wish to reiterate that there is a fundamental misconception in the proposals, which were obviously drafted by someone who does not know or understand the city. In the administration of the court system my constituency is classed as being in Birmingham whereas the hon. Gentleman's constituency is not, so the assumption was made that it would be more natural for my constituents and those in surrounding constituencies to look inwards towards the city centre rather than outwards towards Sutton Coldfield. As the representative of those people, and having grown up in those communities, I assure the House that that assumption is wrong. We do not look towards the centre. We would much prefer to go to court in Sutton Coldfield than to be taken to court in the city centre.

Another issue arose in the meeting that my hon. Friend the Minister kindly granted us. She said that local justice was about justice by one's peers. Of course, it is. If she gained the sense that the toffs in Sutton Coldfield adjudicate over the less toff-like people in Erdington, we want to dispel that impression. As the hon. Gentleman has explained, that is not the demographic case. Even if that absurd notion were true, it would still not deal with the point about local justice. Local justice and judgment by one's peers must ultimately involve the notion that the local people in our communities—not the Lord Chancellor's Department or the West Midlands magistrates courts committee—should be able to decide by whom we are judged. As the hon. Gentleman said, and as my hon. Friend knows, we want to be judged by magistrates sitting on the bench in Sutton Coldfield, not in a super-court in the city centre.

7.58 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Yvette Cooper): I congratulate the hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr. Mitchell) on securing this debate on the proposal by the West Midlands magistrates courts committee to close Sutton Coldfield magistrates court. I thank him and my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Erdington (Mr. Simon) for their kind remarks. They are much appreciated. I am sorry that I cannot take them into account when deciding the future of the courthouse.

I listened carefully to the issues that have been raised. I welcomed the chance to meet them and representatives from their constituencies to discuss the issues and their concerns. They have made passionate speeches on behalf of their constituents and about their concern at the proposal of the West Midlands magistrates courts committee. The hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield said that he understood the current situation whereby the committee has made the proposal to shut Sutton Coldfield magistrates court. However, I cannot comment in detail at this stage on the points raised.

Hon. Members will know that magistrates courts are managed by locally based magistrates courts committees, as set out in the provisions of the Justices of the Peace Act 1997. Each committee is responsible for the efficient and effective administration of the magistrates courts in its area. Decisions to close magistrates courts are also the responsibility of MCCs after consultation with the local paying authority.

In the case of Sutton Coldfield magistrates court, West Midlands MCC made a determination on 19 August 2002 to close it and to transfer the work to a new courthouse in Birmingham. That decision was reached after a period of consultation with both the paying authority and a wide variety of stakeholders. The paying authority concerned, Birmingham city council, lodged an appeal with the Lord Chancellor's Department on 19 September. It is common for MCCs to consult more widely than the local paying authority, which is the local council. Consultees usually include the magistrates, staff, the police, the probation service, the Crown Prosecution Service, MPs and other professional users.

The role for Ministers is as an appellate authority in the event of an appeal being lodged. Ministers do not decide on court closures that are not subject to appeal. Birmingham city council has lodged an appeal and I will need to consider it on the merits of the case presented by each party. The decision will come to Ministers when the dialogue between West Midlands MCC, Birmingham city council and officials in the Department has ended and all parties to the appeal are satisfied that they have made their representations and that their case is complete. Given that the appeal process is ongoing, I cannot comment on specific issues relating to the proposed closure because Ministers are the sole appellate authority.

[Yvette Cooper]

The hon. Member for Sutton Coldfield asked about the time scale. I cannot give a certain answer. As I said, the dialogue has to be completed first. Once everyone has made their representations, officials will need to draw those together and make a recommendation. I may also need to ask other questions and seek further information when I receive that advice. For that reason, I do not want to give him misleading guidance about the time scale in which the decision will be made.

I am keen to ensure that I hear the fullest possible representations from everyone concerned before I make a decision. I also need to ensure that I hear the full views of the West Midlands magistrates courts committee too. The meeting with hon. Members and their constituency representatives was useful and I listened carefully to the points raised today. In particular, it was interesting to hear their responses to many of the questions that I raised at the meeting on the issues discussed then. They are welcome to make further representations before the final decision is taken.

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: I am listening carefully to the Minister's helpful comments. She says that it is part of the duty of the West Midlands magistrates courts committee to take into account the views of a wide range of stakeholders and people who have an interest. As part of her appellate role, will she establish to her satisfaction that it really did take into account the views of all the different stakeholders? Apart from those who have a direct interest in the decision, I cannot discover any stakeholders who have approved of it.

Yvette Cooper: I can assure the hon. Gentleman that I will take into account the views of all stakeholders, and shall certainly seek information on whose views were sought and what they were.

I want to make a few general remarks about the issues that need to be taken into account when magistrates courts committees make such decisions and when appeals are made to Ministers. Much has been said about local justice. It is important that people are judged effectively by their peers. Magistrates who consider a case in a particular area should, where possible, live or work there too. We need to be realistic—local justice cannot and does not mean having a courtroom on every street corner. Magistrates courts committees must balance many complex considerations when making decisions. Geographic access is one important factor to be taken into account. Others include disability access and facilities for witnesses and victims, the lack of which can hinder justice and access to it. For example, victims or witnesses may be intimidated if they do not have sufficiently separate facilities. MCCs must also ensure that they deliver the best combination of services for the entire area within their budget and provide value for money.

We are keen to look at closer working between the court service and MCCs on the use of courthouses, particularly on sharing facilities, where feasible, to ensure the better use of the estate and value for money. Sharing courthouses can often support local justice in areas where, without shared facilities, family courts or magistrates courts could be under pressure.Hon. Members may be aware of the way in which funding works for MCCs. Central Government provide 80 per cent. of their revenue grant and the local authority contributes 20 per cent. MCCs are given an annual allocation, but it is left to each one to determine how best to use the funds to provide services, including the effective and efficient management of courthouses in their area.

As I have set out, a series of issues need to be taken into account by MCCs when making decisions about the use of courthouses and allocations in their areas; Ministers need to consider a wide range of issues when those decisions come before them. As I hope that I have made clear, I shall consider seriously the points made by hon. Members this evening, as well as those they have made in meetings with me. I shall also consider the points made when I met the local coroner, the chairman of the bench and local councillors. I shall consider closely the views of the West Midlands magistrates courts committee and any other relevant points that are made. It is important that the right decision is made, and I hope that people will bear with me as I consider carefully their arguments. I shall keep in touch with them as the process is resolved.

Question put and agreed to.

Adjourned accordingly at eight minutes past Eight o'clock.

Westminster Hall

Thursday 21 November 2002

[SYLVIA HEAL *in the Chair*]

Further Education

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—*[Mr. Jim Murphy .]*

2.30 pm

The Minister for Lifelong Learning and Higher Education (Margaret Hodge): I start by apologising to my hon. Friend the Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman), the Chair of the Select Committee on Education and Skills. He had been intending to open this afternoon's debate and was thwarted, but I can promise him that there will be endless future occasions when we can discuss these issues, which I know are hugely important to him and to other Members.

I am delighted to have the opportunity to spend time on the Floor, albeit on the Westminster Hall Floor, talking about a part of the education and training service that is always grossly undervalued, and which is all too often neglected and ignored, as I am sure many other Members will agree. We in the Labour party have always recognised the importance of the further education sector, so it gives me enormous pride, huge satisfaction and a sense of humble honour to be here today as a Minister with overall responsibility for lifelong learning to set out our ambitions and well-funded plans for investment and reform in the sector.

I pay tribute to my many colleagues who have supported the development of the programme that we have announced this week. My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has always had lifelong learning at the centre of his concerns, and he made the start in ensuring that we put the FE sector back in its rightful place. My right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Estelle Morris) worked closely with us to develop the strategy that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Skills announced earlier this week at a conference of the Association of Colleges. My right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Yardley felt passionately about FE and wanted to be part of the programme that we were putting together for its future.

I pay tribute to the Under-Secretary of State for Education and Skills, my hon. Friend the Member for Bury, South (Mr. Lewis), who cannot be with us today but has worked closely with me to ensure that we can put forward a firm set of proposals that are radical but give us a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to progress in this important sector.

I first state why FE is so important to this Labour Government. In crude terms, more than 4 million students learn in their local FE colleges each year—a large number of people dependent on the services provided by more than 400 colleges. It often comes as a surprise to people to learn that more than half of 16 to 19-year-olds receive their full-time education in the FE sector. We hear much about school sixth forms, and they make a valuable contribution, but the FE sector actually educates more 16 to 19-year-olds than the school sector. FE is also the sector that provides much of the vocational education and training to adults seeking work, where its role is crucial.

FE is a growing and very important provider of higher education. About 11 per cent. of our current HE students receive that education in an FE setting and over time, as we expand to reach our 50 per cent. target, with the focus very much on increasing the number of people undertaking vocational HE courses, the FE sector will play a growing role in higher education.

FE is the key part of the education framework that responds to employer demands for the development of skills in the work force. FE is the main provider of basic literacy and numeracy education for those who seek to acquire such basic skills during their adult years. FE provides that crucial second chance opportunity to all those learners who were failed by the system during their school years. FE provides the opportunity to extend one's horizons and enrich one's life by engaging in the joy of learning things one has never learned before, and probably did so for us all. That is why FE is so important.

FE is central to what the Government are about because it supports our twin objectives of ensuring that we promote economic prosperity and pursue social inclusion. FE helps us create the better skills base that is so important in driving our productivity agenda. Much of that enhanced skills base will, during the coming period, be delivered through FE in programmes like the modern apprenticeships programme, on which we hope to make further announcements in the not-too-distant future. The level 2 targets that we have set for adults will also largely be delivered by those working in FE, and those receiving their education and training in that sector. That is the way in which the skills base is built.

Anyone who spends time in any FE college will see the commitment in the sector towards promoting social inclusion and opportunity for all in our society. One needs only to consider the statistic that I often use—27 per cent. of students in FE come from 15 per cent. of the most deprived and disadvantaged wards in the country—to see how the work of the colleges is focused on those in greatest need. If I refer back to my previous ministerial position, when I had responsibility for people with disabilities, I can say that the provision of many education and training services for people with disabilities was most often provided by the FE sector throughout their lives. That was often supported by the voluntary sector, but FE plays a critical role in ensuring that there really is equality in education and training for those with disabilities. FE is central because it helps us meet those intertwined objectives of inclusion and prosperity.

FE has a good record. All too often there are criticisms, but I want to praise the record that it has established. More than any other part of the education sector, FE has responded well to our widening participation agenda. If we consider any statistic relating to the sort of progression achieved by people who have not been able in the past to stay in education or training and translate that into concrete achievements, we can see how well the sector has worked with disadvantaged people. The achievement rates in FE were up by 5 per cent. last year, which is something that we should celebrate, and the number of colleges that were achieving below 60 per cent. in achievement

[Margaret Hodge]

rates fell from 36 per cent. to 14 per cent. between 1997–98 and 1999–2000. Even at the bottom of the sector there has been a steady improvement in the quality of colleges that were not previously achieving as well as we would have hoped.

I am proud to have been able to announce our first seven beacon colleges in our new programme for celebrating excellence through the awarding of learning and skills beacon status. We now have about 137 colleges that have centres of vocational excellence, which is another way in which we are developing a vocational capability to respond to the local and regional skills agenda, which is the important role that FE fulfils in so many local and regional communities.

It is a good record, but equally, as I said, there are issues that we need to address. That is why we set about thinking about how we could invest in and reform the sector. I want to touch on one or two of those issues.

Although quality is superb in some instances, it is still all too variable between and within colleges. All of us in the Department were concerned about that as the first tranche of inspections emerged under the new inspection regime that we established two or three years ago. It is fair to say that everyone greeted the birth of that regime with some suspicion, but I am pleased to say that it has bedded down and is now respected by all those in the sector. In their joint inspections, the adult learning inspectorate and Ofsted found that 15 per cent. of colleges were inadequate and required full re-inspection, 44 per cent. had some unsatisfactory provision and required some re-inspection, and 20 per cent. suffered from poor leadership. Despite the fact that the findings on work-based learning were even more worrying, that is not a good enough record if FE is to fulfil the role that we want of it.

At the end of October this year, the Learning and Skills Council found that 82 colleges were still in a financially weak position. A recent survey by the Confederation of British Industry showed that only 38 per cent. of members surveyed rated their local colleges as good or excellent providers of training and education. If FE is to play a role in raising skills and productivity levels among our work force, it must be well regarded by employers.

Mr. David Drew (Stroud): I am sorry for missing the first couple of minutes of the debate, and I will have to go to a Select Committee sitting. I know that my hon. Friend follows the goings-on in Stroud with particular interest, and she will be pleased to hear that at long last we have a memorandum of agreement between Stroud college and three 11-to-18 schools, which is good way of working towards properly co-ordinated post-16 education. The college's real grouse is that it is trying to go after the less traditional students, but in so doing is unable to capitalise on the same income stream as if it were concentrating on 16 to 19-year-olds. I know that my hon. Friend is looking to introduce some changes, and I welcome the increased funding, but will she comment on the key issue of how colleges' funding streams could be improved by achieving greater parity?

Margaret Hodge: As my hon. Friend will know, the Learning and Skills Council is reviewing its funding formula to achieve that parity as regards who is taught. It is undoubtedly true that a college receives more income for a full-time student than for a part-time adult student, and that often creates disparities. It is a difficult issue to deal with, but, with the Learning and Skills Council, we are attempting to secure better parity of funding, whatever age group is being taught.

The other issue of concern to us is the quality of the teaching force in the sector. Far too many people teaching both full-time and part-time still do not have the appropriate teaching qualifications, which should be a basic prerequisite of working with adults or 16 to 19-year-olds in whatever context. The information is not 100 per cent. accurate, but we think that the qualification rate is about 60 per cent. of full-timers and 43 per cent. of part-timers, so about 40 per cent. of full-timers and about 60 per cent. of part-timers are without qualifications.

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): Many people in FE colleges will say that the reason why there are so many unqualified part-time lecturers in the FE sector is that over the past five years the Government have not funded the sector well enough to recruit staff, to pay decent salaries and to get the situation in order. It is all very well to criticise Ofsted inspections, but where have the Government been with the funding?

Margaret Hodge: As my hon. Friend knows, we have increased funding, but we are now able to provide a massive injection through the current comprehensive spending review. These welcome resources, which came from both the Chancellor and the Secretary of State for Education and Skills, will enable us to enhance that funding level. The reasons why there has not been investment in the professional development of those who teach in FE colleges are the generation of underfunding and the atmosphere of competition engendered by the previous Government. We are trying to replace that with co-operative, planned provision to enhance quality in the best interests of students.

Mr. David Chaytor (Bury, North): A new dawn is breaking for FE following the speech of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education and Skills in Birmingham on Tuesday. Does the Minister accept that one of the traditional strengths of FE colleges is their ability to bring in part-time tutors who are specialists in their fields to contribute to the teaching on vocational courses? It is completely unrealistic to assume that we should achieve or even desire 100 per cent. of teaching staff to be qualified teachers because many of them will be fully qualified in their own full-time occupation.

Margaret Hodge: I half accept what my hon. Friend is saying. It is not good enough to say to those who want to learn a particular trade or acquire a particular vocational qualification that they will be taught by somebody who has a specialism but cannot teach. We need to ensure that even those who come in as specialists in their vocational sphere have the opportunity to pursue some professional development courses, which will enable them to pick up some pedagogical skills to allow them to impart their specialism in an appropriate

way to their students. That is one of the developments that we will be able to fund out of the generous settlement that we are putting in place for 2003–06.

Mr. Chaytor: I accept completely what my hon. Friend has said. However, there is a difficulty if we apply too rigidly a requirement to have a teaching qualification to people who have very rare, specialist skills. At the end of the day, students ought to judge the quality of teaching in those circumstances.

Margaret Hodge: I agree with my hon. Friend that we should not rigidly require specialists to have those teaching skills. If he were to read the document—the light blue version of "Success for All: Reforming Further Education and Training"—that we published on Tuesday when my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made his speech, he would see that we expect everybody to have a teaching competence by 2010 except those who are starting in teaching, and that they should have the opportunity in their first couple of years to develop their teaching skills. We are not preventing people with technical and vocational skills coming in, but we are ensuring that once they come in they get the appropriate support to allow them to develop their teaching skills.

Mr. Dennis Turner (Wolverhampton, South-East): The settlement and the announcement that we heard on Tuesday will give the Government and the FE sector an opportunity to take on board all the questions that are being raised today. What is important is that the settlement is the best that I can recall. I became chairman of the all-party group on further and adult education in 1988, and today is the most momentous day in FE since then. The praise that the Minister is giving to FE today is most welcome, and we want to thank the Government for their response. We hope that the colleges will respond in the way in which she wishes.

Margaret Hodge: I am immensely grateful for those words. I should like to place on record a tribute to my hon. Friend. I did not realise that he has chaired the all-party group since 1988. During the time that I have been a member of it, he has shown a complete commitment to the sector and to the well-being of all those who work and learn within it.

Mr. Sheerman: I agree with 10 per cent. of what the Minister just said—the 10 per cent. that included accolades for my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton, South-East (Mr. Turner).

Is it not a gross discourtesy to the House that such an important announcement about FE was made at a conference? It is significant that such a piece of news, which is the first of its kind since I came to Parliament—more than 20 years ago—has been announced somewhere other than the House. That is in addition to the fact that the whole issue was snatched from the Select Committee.

I shall make a serious point on what the Minister was saying about the qualifications of practical people with professional skills. One great criticism is that it is too easy to be taught the theory of plumbing or of anything else in an FE college without the practice. Practice—hands-on work—is being driven out because that is the expensive bit.

Margaret Hodge: I agree with my hon. Friend. I hope that he welcomes the opportunity this afternoon for us to have a proper three-hour debate on FE. It is a delight to be able to debate the sector, but it might have been better to do so in the Chamber.

Of course we want good practical, vocational training in FE to build the qualifications and skills that we require. However, he will share memories with me of being at the butt of people who were incredibly good practitioners but not good teachers; both capabilities are needed to impart practical knowledge to students for them to develop the skill to do the job. We are therefore attempting to achieve a complementarity of skills, and we recognise that both are of equal importance.

I shall talk about our wonderful settlement because I am really excited by it. With a strong investment strategy, we are tackling issues in FE radically to raise the game, raise standards, improve participation and raise the status and importance of the sector. There is substantial investment coupled with serious reform. It has been one of the most exciting exercises in which I have been engaged since I have been a Minister. I am proud that we have been able to put a 19 per cent. real-terms increase into the sector over three years. That is substantial money for which the sector has been waiting a long time. I know from my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State that he was warmly welcomed at the Association of Colleges conference on Tuesday. We are putting in an extra £1.2 billion into FE.

I am proud that we are able to announce some stability for the sector with the three-year funding deals, which will be translated from us to the Learning and Skills Council and to every individual college. I am also proud that we have been able to announce a substantial increase in capital investment in the sector. When we first came into office, no capital stream of funding had been left for us by the previous Government. We have increased that funding over time, and in this spending review settlement an extra 60 per cent. over the period will be going into capital—more than £400 million a year by the 2005–06 financial year.

The other thing about which I know that the sector's management and staff will be delighted is that we have consolidated into the base unit funding the teachers' pay initiative—the TPI—and standards funds payments, which were introduced in the previous spending review. That will enable flexibility at college level to spend according to the priorities of the college.

The final element of the strategy to which I shall draw attention is the significant investment that we are making in teaching and learning. That is a new way in which we are trying to raise the quality of the experience for students. The investment is substantial and it is coupled with a radical proposal for the funding of colleges. Colleges will negotiate contracts with their local learning and skills councils. The terms and parameters of the contract will be determined in consultations with the councils, colleges and other partners over the next few months.

We expect contracts to cover issues such as participation—getting more people through the system—improving on success outcomes, engagement

[Margaret Hodge]

with employers and the qualifications and training of staff. These sorts of issues will feed into the terms of the contract, which will then be decided by a local learning and skills council and an individual college.

Dr. John Pugh (Southport): The document envisages that, generally speaking, local learning and skills councils will come to satisfactory arrangements, but occasionally things will go badly wrong. Quite unusually, it states that the Learning and Skills Council will have the ultimate sanction of withdrawing funding from a provider where things do go badly wrong. Do the Government have any procedure in mind for decommissioning colleges? In those circumstances, there would be a college, but no funding. That differs from the usual strategy of the Government, which is to put in a different sort of management.

Margaret Hodge: It might be helpful if I knew exactly what the hon. Gentleman was referring to. I think that he was referring to private providers and circumstances in which we could withdraw from contracts.

If I explain the process in which we will engage, things will become clearer. Once a college has agreed a contract, it will get the consolidated moneys plus a 2 per cent. real-terms increase in funding. If at the end of the first year of operating the college does not meet the targets that were set for it, it will go into the second year without a further 2.5 per cent. increase. If the college does meet the targets, it will receive a further 2.5 per cent. real-terms increase in funding. If the college massively exceeds the target and is excellent, it will get an even higher increase in funding. That process continues into the third year. At the end of the third year, unit funding for the very best colleges could be 7 per cent. per unit greater than unit funding for colleges that have not performed satisfactorily.

We will not leave colleges that do not perform satisfactorily to flounder. Where necessary, there will be intervention from the Learning and Skills Council, supported by moneys that it will retain—in the standards fund, in particular—for improving quality and responding to area inspections.

Mr. Tim Boswell (Daventry): The Minister may have anticipated my question. She helpfully explained the concept of reinforcing success by making additional funding available against targets. Can she confirm that in cases of difficulty—for example, if there is a failing college, or even a college with a lower level of difficulty—there will at least be the possibility through the local learning and skills council of accessing what might be termed remedial funding to put the situation right? It is no good just writing off a college that has got into difficulties.

Margaret Hodge: There will be access to funding through a standards fund retained by both the central Learning and Skills Council and the local learning and skills councils. It will be a much-diminished fund because we are going to give some of it out to colleges in their unit funding.

If necessary, we will go ahead with closing and cutting out poor provision. Indeed, we have already decided to close North Derbyshire tertiary college. The quality of the teaching and learning was such that we felt that the interests of learners in that area would best be met by the closure of the college and by provision being taken over by neighbouring colleges. We are determined to cut out poor provision and to put at the heart of what we do the interests of the learner and of local employers who require skills to be taught in their locality. The new contracts are a new way of delivering public service reform, and I believe that the rest of government will be watching how successfully we develop the process in the FE sector.

Before I speak briefly about other elements of our reform programme, I want to say that we are extremely conscious of the burden of bureaucracy that affects far too many FE colleges. We are grateful to Sir George Sweeney for the work that he has done on tackling bureaucracy in the FE sector. I believe that he gave a speech yesterday to the Association of Colleges. He has published his report and findings on the first exercise in cutting unnecessary red tape from processes and funding regimes under which FE exists. However, that is a first stage. We are determined to take further steps on aspects such as the inspection, audit and information regimes to ascertain whether we can further cut red tape so that all those who are engaged in teaching and learning in a college can focus on the most important thing, which is raising standards and quality for the students.

I shall pick out a few features of our reform programme to inform Members of our exciting agenda. Much of what we do will depend on area reviews that are carried out by local learning and skills councils of the provision in their locality. From next spring, the area reviews will focus on the 14-to-19 agenda that we have set ourselves. The reviews may result in structural change in the locality, but we do not have a blueprint of how provision should be delivered. It will differ according to local needs and circumstances, the strengths and weaknesses of local providers and whether the area is rural or urban. We want every college to focus on and play to its strengths.

One reason that standards have not been as high as they could have been is that the general FE colleges have tried to do too much, from working with disaffected 14-year-olds right through to delivering HE courses to more able students. If the quality of what is offered in the FE sector is to be raised, colleges must play to their strengths.

We believe that over time that will result in a more distinct 16-to-19 provision, sometimes in separate 16-to-19 colleges—sixth form colleges—but sometimes in distinct centres set up as part of a general FE college. Much of the change in the configuration of local colleges will be supported by other policies, such as the development of the Connexions service, which will be universal in England from April 2003, and the rolling out of the education maintenance allowances, which will be available by 2004. That is one feature of the investment programme.

I wish to speak briefly about how we are trying to get a much better take on ensuring that the training and education supplied in a locality really meet employers' needs. The link between the skill needs in a locality and

the providers' delivery of education and training has not been strong enough in the past. Part of any improvement will come out of the skills strategy and delivery plan that we are publishing next June, part of it will come out of the review of adult learning, which will also be published next year, and we expect the developing sectors and skills councils to play a role in ensuring that we offer the appropriate training.

We want the colleges and the learning and skills councils to work far more closely with the regional development agencies, and within the framework for regional employment skills action plans that those agencies have developed. Part of that link into employment will come through the centres of vocational excellence that we are developing. We are delighted to announce in the document that 400 centres of vocational excellence will be up and running by 2006.

We will review the qualifications framework to ensure that it meets employers' needs. We have a strong commitment to expanding the modern apprenticeship programme to meet the skills deficit, which has such an impact on productivity in the UK.

The subject of pedagogy in further education has never been tackled before. Much of our thinking has evolved from the success of the literacy and numeracy strategies at primary level. They have shown us that if best practice is developed in teaching and learning strategies, if materials are provided and there is training and support for teachers, the quality, and hence the outcome for students, can be raised.

To build on that, we have established a new standards unit within the Department which will be staffed largely by secondees from the sector with particular specialisms. We are not creating a new centre of expertise but building on what is there and trying to spread it.

The standards unit will be well resourced, with £100 million by 2005–06. It will focus on curriculum areas, taking one at a time and developing materials, pedagogy and training programmes for people working in colleges. In the first year, we hope to cover four curriculum areas and we will look at business studies, science, construction and entry to employment. We shall cover a further four curriculum areas next year and seven in the third year of this spending review.

Linked to those matters is the need to invest in staff. We have already discussed how the qualification level of those working in further education is not sufficient to ensure that people have the competences that they require to impart good teaching. We have set ourselves ambitious targets: by 2010 only new entrants will not be qualified. The interim target for 2006 is for 90 per cent. of full-time and 60 per cent. of part-time lecturers and teachers working in the FE sector to have a teaching qualification, which will be met partly through the expenditure of moneys being devolved to colleges through the standards funds and the teachers' pay initiative, hence the importance of the contract. It is through the contract that we will deliver our policies at college level.

I am delighted that we are almost at the point of announcing the successful bidder for our leadership college, which we hope will be up and running by April next year. It will run courses to grow new leadership and to support existing ones at all levels of management, to enhance the strategic capacity and management of colleges. That will be underpinned by the quality framework, which is part of our success for all strategy. Floor targets will be introduced so that every college knows that it must achieve certain learner-out success rates and, as we always do in such instances, we shall attempt to develop better-valued measures than we can at present and use them in establishing floor targets.

Inspection framework will continue to play an important role. The provider reviews that the Learning and Skills Council undertakes will also have a role. We want colleges themselves to undertake regular surveys on the views of their students and on the quality of teaching and learning. That is an important ingredient in determining the quality of what is offered in a college.

There will be more beacon colleges if, as we expect, more colleges excel in what they do, and we intend to introduce a new scheme of awards for all staff built on the teaching awards scheme, in order to value teaching and learning in the FE sector.

We can deliver this whole exciting package only based on partnership between the Department and the Learning and Skills Council. We must be in the driving seat, but both partners must work with colleges, the inspectorates, staff, trade unions and others to achieve our ambitions.

We will know that we have succeeded only when we have increased the number of people who participate in learning in FE colleges, when we begin to raise the success outcomes, when our ambitions for raising quality have been achieved, and when our determination to strengthen the engagement of colleges with the demands of employers has been realised. Everyone must play their part, and it is down to all of us as partners in this endeavour to work with this exciting reform and strong investment agenda to deliver much better prospects for those who depend on further education.

3.10 pm

Mr. Tim Boswell (Daventry): It is always a pleasure to debate further education, even though it is now public knowledge that this slot was originally assigned to higher education and has been transferred to further education because the Government are not yet in a position to announce their plans for financing higher education. However, the Government's difficulty is our opportunity. Further education is not a second best to higher education.

The Minister has set out her case at some length; she had a lot to talk about, much of which we would agree with. It increasingly seems to me, however, that she is the Jekyll and Hyde of the Labour education team. In the first part of her remarks, in which she set out the case for FE, I would have gone no further than saying "Ditto", because she gave an eloquent and proper account of the important role of FE, which, as she rightly said, had not been adequately highlighted in the past.

Last night, those of us, including the hon. Member for Bury, North (Mr. Chaytor), who had the opportunity to go to the Association of Colleges for Further and Higher Education dinner, saw FE at its best, both in the tremendous people involved and in the wonderful

[Mr. Tim Boswell]

cabaret performed by young people doing their own thing, doing it well and to a high level of professionalism. That cheered us all up.

I agreed with the Under-Secretary of State for Education and Skills, the hon. Member for Bury, South (Mr. Lewis), that we should no longer speak about FE as if it were the Cinderella sector. I hope that no one in this Chamber believes that to be the case.

The Mr. Hyde side of the Minister's character was demonstrated when, after those honeyed words of encouragement, she reverted to her earlier habit of discussing inadequacies. That habit has not always commended itself to the sector.

Although none of us, including Opposition Members, must be uncritical, I believe that anyone considering the FE sector dispassionately would see how much it has achieved, given the resources available and the material with which it sometimes works. The value added from the FE sector is high. Discussing failing colleges and those colleges that do not meet their targets, even if the thresholds of those targets are set high, is not always the best way of encouraging co-operation or a positive response.

Another aspect of the Minister's Mr. Hyde character is an aversion to delicate and difficult issues. I sat back and allowed her parliamentary colleagues to make certain points, with some firmness, about the skills agenda, and about who is available to teach in FE. I believe that that was but a sample of the sort of withering fire that she will receive from colleagues and Opposition Members if she pursues certain lines of argument on funding for higher education. This is not a matter where easy, pat solutions can be achieved without a great deal of distress. I do not wish to trespass further on the generosity of the Chamber by saying more about that.

Before a Government Member is tempted to intervene to suggest that I am being churlish, I must point out that I do not intend to be churlish about the positive aspects of announcements that have been made this week. In particular, if only because I am attracted by the colour of the cover, I commend to the House the Government's new document "Success for All". The Secretary of State's introduction sets out a template by which the success or otherwise of the policies to be adopted in the next few years will be judged. He says:

> "The sector must ensure that 14 to 19-year-old learners have greater choice and higher standards with a wide range of academic and vocational programmes providing clear opportunities to progress to higher education and skilled employment. It must also ensure that adult learners have greater access to excellent provision for basic skills, training for work and learning for personal development and that employers have a productive engagement with a transformed and responsive network of providers committed to meeting regional and sub-regional skills needs. This is our challenge to you."

That is pretty unexceptionable. I would not have put in some of the adjectives and I would not have implied that the challenge was just to the providers and did not include the Secretary of State. However, he is more or less along the right lines in what he is looking at in the FE sector.

I said that I intended to be reasonably generous in relation to this week's announcement. There is, if not a standing instruction, a prevalent habit of Opposition education spokespersons to say that any Government announcement of additional funds should be accompanied by a health warning. I give that warning to the Committee.

There is a lot of detail and small print to look at. There are, for example, transfers which the hon. Lady explained from the standards fund and from the teaching policy initiative into mainstream funding. Most of us on the Opposition Benches have been in favour of mainstream funding and not cutting money up into penny packets over the years. If that is a triumph, we will claim it. But there are one or two areas of specific concern, which again feature in the discussions that some of us have had over the past day or two. For example, the 1 per cent. uplift in national insurance contributions could, on a quick calculation, cost the sector at least £10 million and probably more next year. There is the whole question of paying for pensions, which is a great difficulty throughout the public sector and is a potential contingent liability, although I believe that the Government are minded to pay some attention to that matter.

Nevertheless, there is extra money for the sector. We welcome that. I do not wish to pretend otherwise. Indeed, one of the reasons why I welcome it is because I can reasonably claim to have had a longstanding enthusiasm for and commitment to further education. I have that because I believe passionately that it can reach the parts of the system that others would not claim to reach. It involves, strikingly, twice as many students as the whole of the higher education sector. For example, membership of the National Union of Students among further education colleges is greater than in higher education. We often forget that. Not all of the students are full-time. It delivers more A-levels than the school system.

The FE sector has a huge range. At one end there is special needs provision, which I am pleased the Minister touched upon. There is adult basic skills provision, where I have a family involvement. Then there is conventional level 2 and level 3 qualifications, in both general academic education and vocational activities. It goes all the way through to degree-level work and even post-graduate professional development and skills updating. It is an interesting thought that possibly alongside the Open university, what might be termed the "further education university" of this country has a larger number of higher education participants than any other university in this country. It does everything, and has a great range.

A general caveat is that eyebrows were beginning to lift on this side with some concern that in the move to try to create specialism, what could be termed the "GP function" of further education might be overlooked. I am not against centres of vocational excellence or a concentration of resources where they are available, but we never want to reach a situation in which people are turned away because there is no local provision. That is one of the great strengths of further education. It is possible to argue that there is a complementarity about having those different levels of provision together, which I suspect Government Members argued in relation to the comprehensive principle. It is possible to be too tidy minded about the issue.

On the skills agenda, in a famous lecture to the Royal Society of Arts in 1884 concern was expressed about the skills gap that had developed between the United Kingdom and Germany. It is entirely appropriate to re-examine some of the apparent distinctions. The German vocational system has great strengths that are not always pedagogic, but come from the commitment to the binary system and employers' active engagement. That is the best underpinning of the system and its importance. I would very much welcome the same climate of opinion in the UK, if we could create it.

If we are honest, which we should be in any debate in Westminster Hall, social progress in this country is not the exclusive preserve of any one party or Government. We make haste slowly, to some extent, by building on each other's achievements and successes. If the Minister is honest, she will concede that, even now, we have probably not got as far as we should in relation to skills. The process is one of trying to readdress the problem of the skills gap. The Minister has some recent and powerful allies. I gather from press reports that the Chancellor of the Exchequer was recently quoted as having noticed that it is very difficult to get skilled trades people in southern England and that they are much more expensive than in Scotland where there is a comparative labour surplus. Most employers could have told him that, and probably do when he asks them.

I said that we are not discussing higher education this afternoon, but with great respect to the Minister, the Government's arbitrary adoption of the target of a 50 per cent. higher education participation must not be at the expense of the appropriate vocational education provision. The essential need of employers to whom I talk is for skills. They do not want stupid people or those who cannot adapt. I am worried that there may be some diversion of effort from that area.

I noticed that no less distinguished a person than the Chairman of the Select Committee on Education and Skills was not wholly complimentary about the Government's record on further education. I would settle for saying that it is patchy, at best. During the early 1990s, when I had ministerial responsibilities for education, we made resources available for a massive increase in participation, which, amazingly, we achieved. Since then, Ministers of the current Administration have done their best to rubbish that achievement and have gone on about franchises. However, the fact is that there were real increases in participation, most of which was of high quality and successful.

Mr. Khalid Mahmood (Birmingham, Perry Barr): The increase in participation came with an abrupt cut in distance learning education in 1997, leaving many of those who wanted to participate in it with no future indication of funding whatever.

Mr. Boswell: I am delighted to say that by the time that that happened, I was not the Minister. I am aware that it was distressing, but since that day, participation rates have not risen again. I was just coming on to that point. Participation has not improved throughout the six-year period of the Labour Administration. A target to increase numbers by 700,000 over two years has not materialised, but I do not blame the further education sector or even the past financial package; we must move on to deal with the stagnation.

The Minister said little about the state of industrial relations in the colleges or the professional development of college staff. I hate industrial disputes, which often achieve little. The Opposition should not capitalise frequently on such occurrences, but the Committee must note that until recently NATFHE was in dispute not so much with the employers as with the Government.

Margaret Hodge: With the employers.

Mr. Boswell: Does the Minister not recall that employers lobbied hard for a bigger envelope in order to pay their staff more appropriately? They were having considerable difficulty in securing that from the Government. I am pleased that that, too, is suspended, at least for the time being.

I shall move on to the first of my main concerns. According to figures provided by the Association of Colleges, the disparity on entering the profession between the pay of an FE lecturer and a school teacher—let alone a computer specialist in the private sector—is roughly 18 per cent., which also applies at the top of the scale. The FE scale is much longer than the teachers' scale. It is a large and significant disparity, not a minor adjustment.

We should recall the comments of the Association of Colleges, which has tried, like myself, not to be churlish about this week's announcement. It said:

"Today's announcement goes some way to creating equality. The Association of Colleges still wants the gap closed completely."

That is a fair statement of its position and of its worry that it may still be difficult, even with the package that the Secretary of State and the Minister have mentioned. Enrolment has been a problem, particularly in the adult learners sector, which has relatively poor resourcing in comparison with the 16-to-19 sector. Problems will remain, even when the package has worked its way through.

I shall touch briefly on other concerns. One is the degree of interference by the Government. The rot started with the original remit letter from the Government to the Learning and Skills Council. I recall that 76 indents were put out to the LSC. I can just imagine saying to my secretary, "Please take 76 urgent letters." It is much better to set out three or four priorities and concentrate on them. That should bring about the possibility of achieving and measuring success. Too many targets can be dangerous, leading to confusion of achievement with the target—perhaps an occasional aim of the Government. We need to know exactly what we want in respect of enrolment and quality, but we do not want a huge burden of bureaucracy. The Minister is now bent, with the assistance of Sir George Sweeney, on repairing some of the bureaucracy that she herself created for colleges.

Another factor is that there are so many players in the field. There are colleges and their boards, governors and councils, who clearly have their own views on how they should be run. They are inevitably second-guessed by the local learning and skills councils, which are of uneven quality, although mine in Northamptonshire is particularly good. Plans are then subject to further moderation by the Learning and Skills Council itself.

[Mr. Boswell]

On top of that are the regional development agencies, with whom the councils are now enjoined to work even more closely.

There are a whole plethora of bodies and targets in this field, and there is a danger that that could get in the way of teaching. There is also a concern about the mutuality, or stakeholding, in the process. Of course, it might occasionally be necessary to take tough remedial measures, but the basic approach should be to encourage, and to try to share a way through problems, rather than to wield the big stick.

Another area of concern is the inspection regime. As the Minister rightly said, concerns were expressed about that in the past. Some complexities are the direct result of Government structuring, but it is fair to say that, on the whole, the regime has worked reasonably satisfactorily. However, I would not like her to feel that there are absolutely no problems. I have heard concerns from one of my colleges about the nature of an inspection that took place during the revision process, which was quite untypical of the normal teaching activity in the college.

I need to repeat that, in making any criticisms of the FE sector—which should not be immune from criticism—we must take account of the value added that it has achieved and of the historic legacy of the sector. We are all familiar with going into classes of children of 16 who had left school with nothing better than a D grade, decided that they want to do something such as catering, found it interesting, and suddenly reinvested in education because they needed basic skills, such as the ability to calculate and measure quantities. That is great, and the sad thing—I think Ministers are beginning to learn this lesson—for FE and higher education is that that is not always being dealt with at school level. It should be dealt with there as far as possible, before it becomes a problem later.

I am also a little concerned about the inspection of adult training, which does not get enough attention. Perhaps we should look at it on another occasion. The Minister touched only briefly on the advanced modern apprenticeships. She might want to increase them now, but their numbers have been going down. If we are to get the skills needed, we must secure an increase in numbers.

That brings me naturally to the qualification framework. The Minister mentioned restructuring. It will be interesting to see whether the model that emerges is specialist A-level provision or, as she implied, specialist provision for 16 to 19-year-olds, which could of course include vocational skills and vocational A-levels, and would be distinct from adult provision. In certain cases that might be appropriate, although the Minister will be aware of all the demarcation lines that that would draw. One player that I did not mention was the local education authority, its role as the school provider and maintainer, and how that is to be broken. Whether there will be joint governance and what the lines of accountability should be, for example, could become real issues in my constituency.

I wonder whether we have the right handle on vocational qualifications. In the same way that this debate might be taken, as I suggested, as subsidiary to an HE debate that has not taken place, I am worried that people looking at vocational A-levels might say that they are almost the same as other A-levels, but not quite what people wanting to go on to higher education should have. That kind of class distinction would not be helpful.

We should also bear in mind the implications for the FE sector of an international baccalaureate, if that is what Ministers want to go towards, which offers something quite different and might or might not be able to be incorporated in that sector. In case there is any misconception, I am a strong supporter of moving towards a framework of imparting and validating teaching skills in further education. There are constraints, as hon. Members have mentioned, but it must be right to move towards that in a sensible and planned way.

I am surprised by one little skeleton in the closet that the Minister chose not to mention, which is the fiasco over individual learning accounts. That has caused a problem for individual students, for providers and the sector as a whole, and it has not gone away yet. I had correspondence this week concerning a business that was owed £186,000 in relation to the delivery of training to 4,000 students. The business had provided proof of the delivery of that training to the Department as long ago as October 2001. The business cannot receive payment and does not know whether the Department has yet paid the ILA provider, because the Department will not confirm that.

There is excess expenditure of the order of £70 million. A large number of accounts are still open, and we are now told that the Government will make no announcement of their proposals for a replacement scheme until June 2003. Moreover, it is still not clear when the proposals will be implemented after that announcement. We will have at least a two-year hiatus in provision for supporting individual skills. I cannot help feeling that the Chancellor has told the Department that it has overspent by £70 million and that the Budget will mark time until that is clawed back. Then, and only then, will the Department be allowed to begin a new scheme. Unfortunately, skills are required in the meanwhile, and they are not being delivered to the ordinary people who need them.

I do not want to close on a purely negative note. Ministers may well be learning lessons about the central importance of the further education sector. That sector does not need, and has never benefited from, an authoritarian approach. There is a huge amount of initiative and enterprise approaches—in the widest sense of the word—available in the sector, in its staff and colleges. That needs monitoring, encouragement and the appropriate finance from Ministers. Above all, even more than higher education, the sector holds the keys to skills and competitiveness for the United Kingdom as a whole. We should not forget that, because individuals' lives have been changed by what they have done in FE, even when they had never done anything like that before, through a dedicated staff, that is not particularly well paid or well recognised.

FE has created opportunities for people of all abilities at all levels to shine. It is worth while for the country, but it is hugely worth while for the individual as well. To adopt that as a positive approach is the best way of securing what in the words of the Government's

document—Governments are good at words—is appropriately described as "success for all", which we would all wish to see achieved.

3.39 pm

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield): It is a great pleasure to speak in this debate. As hon. Members will know, disappointingly the debate programme for this afternoon, which was allocated to the Select Committee on Education and Skills to devote to higher education, was taken from us at short notice and taken over by the Government. I fully understand their reasons, but I have to point out to the Minister and members of the Select Committee that we are delighted to debate further education, for which it has been a good week. Moreover, we are making a point concerning the relationship between the legislature and the Executive. The debate was changed—it has not been replaced—at 10 o'clock in the morning and replaced by a Government debate. We have lost that debating time and I have had no assurance from the Government through the usual channels that we shall ever get it back.

Will the Minister use her good offices to ensure that we get a replacement debate? By that I do not mean a debate when the Government have at last responded to the Select Committee's report on higher education and higher education finance—we should get that anyway—but a replacement debate for this lost time, which has been lost to the Public Accounts Committee or any other Select Committee that bid for it. This morning, I was in the Liaison Sub-Committee in which different Select Committees were bidding for time for debates—bidding for time that is scarce and precious. Will the Minister use her good offices to get us a replacement debate, and not just one on higher education?

Mr. Boswell: I am grateful to the Chairman of the Select Committee for giving way. I should like to associate the Opposition with the request to the Minister and the Government to replace the debate as soon as is conveniently possible.

Mr. Sheerman: As Chairman of the Select Committee, I find it slightly irritating when the Government miss attempts by some hon. Members—there are not many of us—to assert a little bit more power and status for the legislature. I echo others when I say that the document is important and contains the most important messages to the FE sector in my time in Parliament. I do not see why the Minister or the Secretary of State should not have made a proper statement to the House. The document was available in the Vote Office, but that is not the same as a proper statement. The Government are in effect saying that FE is a Cinderella by not giving it due time with a full statement on the Floor of the House. You may think that I am getting old and pernickety, Mr. Amess, but I had to make that point, firmly.

We have become accustomed to Green Papers and White Papers, but this interesting document has not been explained to me—it is neither fish nor fowl. It is certainly a blue paper, and the hon. Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell) likes the colour. Is it a thought piece by the new Secretary of State? If it is, he has thought very rapidly. What is it? Is it an action plan? Will everything in it come about? It is not a consultation document because we have had the consultation document. I am holding my breath to find out its official status.

Margaret Hodge: Neither rabid blue nor pale blue has ever been my colour. When I was told that a fantastic designer who supports our endeavours in the Department for Education and Skills had selected the blue cover, I wondered whether we had got the best designer. The document is a policy statement that takes forward the allocation of resources from the comprehensive spending review and explains how the money will be spent.

Mr. Sheerman: Good. We have it on the record. Thank you for allowing me to extract that from the Minister, Mr. Amess.

The document is, of course, good news for the further education sector. I shall not speak for long on this important subject, because many other hon. Members want to speak, some of whom have worked in or spent time in FE for much longer than I have. When I worked for a living a long time ago, I was in higher education, so the FE experts will be waiting to get in.

What is missing from the document is a sufficient spelling out of the vision of what we want FE to supply over the coming years. I shall give the Minister and hon. Members a flavour of my thinking. Given the backdrop of the very much delayed White Paper on higher education, a malicious little thought pops up when one listens to this good news on FE. The Secretary of State informs us—some of us had an inkling of it—that 40 per cent. of HE is carried out in FE. It is the Government's target that 50 per cent. of the cohort enter higher education. That is an enormously ambitious target, and there is no doubt that FE will have to play a large part in that expansion. Some of us suspect that it might be a cheap way of rapidly expanding HE numbers—perhaps inevitably and rightly, in view of the scarce resources that we shall be able to devote to HE. Whatever the case, FE will play an increasing role in delivering higher education for local students. That is important.

The whole area of HE and FE is starting to be transformed. I do not know how many mergers are taking place between universities and FE colleges, but I know that only last week Huddersfield university in my constituency announced a merger with Doncaster college. Some time previously, there was an announcement that Bradford university and Bradford college would be seeking a merger. Such decisions will become much more common. The boundaries between HE and FE will change dramatically. At the same time, as was said earlier, there is secure funding in providing A-level courses for 16 to 19-year-olds but less secure funding for many other courses.

A worrying factor constantly comes up when we consider the grand perspective of the future of FE. When Select Committee members travel around the country visiting schools and colleges—for example, we were in Birmingham for a week in September—we find that the skills that our colleges provide are not quite matched to the skills that are needed out there. One highly valued member of the Committee has a hobby horse: he is always reminding me that we are not training enough electricians and plumbers. That is probably

[Mr. Sheerman]

true, but there is a more serious element at the heart of the matter. I recently spoke to the Minister responsible for science, Lord Sainsbury, and his real concern is that we are failing to train enough technicians to work across the piece—in the health service, in universities and in the private sector. We are failing to produce that level of people—a serious potential skills deficit to which we are not responding. As FE is pushed into the HE world, or the 16-to-19 or A-level world, we must seriously address the fact that we have to get absolutely right, as a matter of urgency, the skills that make the economy motor day in, day out.

I seem to be bashing the Government a bit, but only in the lightest way. If I ever get cross with them, they will know about it. However, I was disappointed when the Minister's colleague wrote to me about individual learning accounts. After the hard work that my Committee, and many others, had put into investigating that serious collapse of a Government policy, we wanted to know when it would be replaced. We think that it is a wonderful idea. The Committee was unanimous across the parties that it is a wonderful scheme to reach out to people who were not receiving learning before. All sorts of people and age groups are entering lifelong learning and acquiring skills through individual learning accounts.

We conducted an investigation a long time ago and were keen for the ILA to be replaced. From the investigation and ministerial responses to it, we got the feeling that soon we would see ILA mark 2. A Minister who has now moved to the Treasury intimated that soon a smaller-scale replacement for the ILA would be introduced. As Chairman of the Select Committee, I received a letter from the Minister responsible saying that there would be a groundbreaking national skills strategy but that the Government could not get that together until June so it was tidier to pull it in with the ILA.

I sometimes feel that if we locked up a group of people who are well informed on the subject for a wet weekend in a country house and supplied them with sandwiches and coffee, we could come up with a national skills strategy. We do not need that, however, because we have the Learning and Skills Council, an enormous Department with some 5,750 people, and Ofsted which is almost half that size. Do we have national training organisations? Some, not all, have been abolished. Skills sector councils are being introduced, but they are not fully formed. It is a bit of a mess, and I am not sure that this is the groundbreaking skills strategy and delivery plan that we need. We must accept that we have a pretty good picture of the skills deficiencies in this country and move rapidly—before June 2003—to do something about them, because the FE sector will be right on the front line of delivering those skills.

I feel slight irritation because there are so many initiatives, such as the abolition of national training organisations. I meet people all the time who say that they still work for an NTO but do not know whether they have a job. Others tell me, "If you want a million pounds, just think up an idea for a schools sector council and you'll get it." The opportunities are indeed fabulous, but they are not joined up.

I come from an era when Governments talked about person-power planning, which is totally unfashionable now. We must, however, have an element of assessing and auditing the skills that the nation needs and how they should be delivered. With that, I shall end my rapping of Government knuckles.

There are lots of good things to say about the document, especially if it is translated into action. The hon. Member for Daventry was absolutely right: as any sensible politicians should, we must consider the announcements carefully and see whether the money is delivered. I used to be shadow Minister, and remember that I could not count the number of times that the Conservative Government launched the initiative of 1,000 extra policemen—they did so time and again. When Roy Hattersley—now Lord Hattersley—was my boss in home affairs, it was said that the Labour party never knowingly underlaunched and Roy Hattersley never knowingly underlunched. That was before he became a vegetarian.

We shall be watching carefully. The amount of money given by the Secretary of State and the Minister must come through to the sharp end of the sector without too many strings attached. The document states that the Government want to cut bureaucracy, which is absolutely right. However, I do not approve of money for nothing, and there is always a bureaucratic level embedded in things such as this.

I have many good friends in the FE sector, including those in the Association of Colleges and the National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education—those people who make the FE sector work—and some of them think that Christmas has come early. Indeed, it has; this is wonderful news, for which they have been lobbying a long time. However, the Committee expects to see delivery of a higher quality service for the money and resources, and we shall be watching very carefully to ensure that the service flows through to the people who matter the most: the students who come into the colleges to receive skills training. It is not good enough at the moment. I applaud the Minister for taking on the colleges and saying, "Come on. Ofsted is saying that half of you are not performing well. You have to perform to standards, and you will not get extra money until you do." That is good news.

When I visit colleges and universities—let us concentrate on colleges—or talk to learning and skills council people and the many people who run the organisations that make education happen, I sometimes worry about the quality of management. It is often taken for granted, as are resources. One can walk through the door of an FE college and meet the principal and their tiny group of back-up staff who are responsible for delivering sophisticated budgets and programmes. Indeed, Huddersfield, a town with a university, has a very large FE college. The college has more students and offers a greater variety of courses than the university but has a very thin management capability. When I walk across to the university and meet the vice-chancellor, I realise that management support for the running of a university in this country is also thin. The management depth is not always there. Sometimes we ask people to deliver with a very thin capability.

The Select Committee visited six or seven universities in the United States. We were very impressed by the high quality and depth of the management support. Most of the people have MBAs. The universities have very sophisticated management types who ensure delivery of their management. I hope that the Government do not take it for granted that that will happen. Management must be considered, and resources must flow into it as well as into teaching. I say that a little nervously because people always criticise so-called bureaucracy, but good management is not wasteful bureaucracy.

I want to finish—I have taken too much time—on a hobby horse of mine. At York university last Thursday evening, I spoke at the annual conference of UVAC. Many people might suppose that that was a new domestic appliance; in fact, it is the University Vocational Awards Council. I was profoundly impressed by the people there who viewed the whole of our educational system—11 to 14, 14 to 19, higher education—as a seamless relationship. They want a commitment from the Government to a continuous process. They want us to think of education not only in FE terms but as a seamless transition.

We have not heard enough about the 14 to 19 Green Paper since its publication. If such education is to achieve parity of esteem and become a respected vocational strand, we must give it much more attention and resources. We must take on the people who divide the debate and who say that more means worse. They sicken me. I am sometimes tempted to go on the "Today" programme to discuss the matter. Three months ago, the Institute of Directors put out an awful so-called policy document—I believe that it was written by Ruth Lea—which says that we need fewer people entering higher education and more plumbers and electricians. What an absurd hypothesis.

Yes, of course we need more skilled tradesmen, technicians and all of those valuable people who make our country run, as I said earlier, but for goodness' sake, 60 per cent. of the population do not go on to higher education. There is a lot of capacity for people to upskill and improve their skills, but I am still dedicated to making the higher education system available to every talent that can benefit from it. I know that the 50 per cent. that is the commitment of the Prime Minister and the Department for Education and Skills could be questioned as a round figure. When the Select Committee questioned Sir Michael Bishard, the former permanent secretary, on whether 50 per cent. was based on ruthless analysis of international competition, was based on research or was a big round fat sexy number, he smiled and assented to the last of those. Let us not be hung up on 50 per cent., but ensure that the figure is what delivers to every person in this country who could benefit from higher education.

I want to say in passing, as I warned him that I would, that the Chairman of the Public Administration Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Cannock Chase (Tony Wright), rather surprised and saddened me yesterday when, in a question to the Prime Minister, he slated the fact that some universities had courses on aromatherapy and golf course management. I celebrate the diversity of courses. Media studies, rather than being a nonsense course as some critics outside the House call it, provides excellent training for the burgeoning business sector, and people who study it get well-paid jobs. I deprecate people who, when faced with a range of competitive courses offering vocational education at FE and HE level, think that they are in some way inferior. I checked what was being taught at Oxford, which still includes Byzantine studies. I do not know whether anyone can get a job with Byzantine studies, but there are all kinds of odd things on offer.

Mr. Boswell: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr. Sheerman: I will not, because I want to finish.

I have rapped a few knuckles. I welcome this week's announcement on the FE sector. I believe that "Success for All" is a very good starting point for the revolution in FE that I hope will take place during the next five years.

4.2 pm

Dr. John Pugh (Southport): I apologise for the absence of my hon. Friend the Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis). He would very much like to be here but cannot be. I have no intention of trying to rival his experience, knowledge or eloquence.

I have read "Success for All" from cover to cover, and most of my remarks will be on the Government's strategy. My starting point is that we preside over an historic skills shortage, which is crippling industry—the construction industry, the rail industry and manufacturing industry generally. It is frustrating customers. Quite apart from the Chancellor of the Exchequer, I have serious difficulty at the moment in finding a plasterer in the north-west for a hole in my ceiling. Everyone is aware of the shortage, and its extent is horrifying. We have moved on from a situation where there are not enough people in training; there are now not enough people to provide the training.

In the past, arrangements were come to in local areas where employment was largely provided by local companies, whereby technical colleges and FE colleges would liaise with local and national industry to match skills and employment. Arrangements would be made almost naturally that made sense to commerce and students. I am thinking back to the 1960s and 1970s, when there was not the same emphasis on the skills shortage. What seems to have happened is that industry has gradually withdrawn from its training role and absolved itself of that. That was partly because of the recession, when training had to be cut first, and partly because some industries found the attraction of employing unskilled, mobile labour or exporting labour greater than that of providing a training budget. Industry is less identified with its local area than ever and, to that extent, footloose.

We have been through a phase in which a craftsman has become increasingly a curiosity. That trend is not worsened by, but is parallel with, a drive for more university entrants. I do not subscribe to the view expressed at Prime Minister's Question Time yesterday that there is anything particularly wrong with rugby studies and aromatherapy. In fact, I can see quite a good case for combining those subjects, if possible. However, there has been a cultural change against manual and technical work and we must record it. Manual and technical work is no longer held in the same esteem. Once, a good percentage of Labour Members would

[Dr. John Pugh]

have been capable of earning their living with their hands and their technical skills, if they were not MPs. I do not know whether any Labour Members are currently able to do that or to demonstrate that they can, rather than just say that they can.

We must record a genuine cultural change: what people do with words has become rather more important than their practical abilities and what they do with their hands. It seems that the wordsmiths and the toilers have fought to get a reward. When it comes to further education, we must make a serious point about the dignity and value of craftsmanship and problem-solving abilities. Each and every one of us counts on those abilities at some point in our life. A good number of individuals can count on such abilities for employability, and the economy definitely and expressly requires such skills.

I know that I am preaching to the converted. Hon. Members are nodding. The key point that I am trying to address is what the Government plan to do about the situation. The Government know that further education has somewhat lost its way. They know that the funding level of further education has not been what it should be; they may not acknowledge that publicly, but I am sure that they do tacitly. They have come forward with a solution: "Success for All". I do not want to be unkind about that document because it has many very good features. It is, in parts, a little repetitive and it contains some unnecessary, patronising platitudes. I wish to some extent that the document had been drawn up with a slight sense of irony.

I have plucked some statements from the document. It states that the Government are going to put teaching, training and learning

"at the heart of what we do".

That is encouraging. The Government want

"every college ... to be clear about its own educational and training mission".

Well, so they should. They think that we need to motivate talented pupils so that they progress to higher education. That is scarcely earth-shattering news. I also recall that it is important that teachers and trainers should be qualified to teach and train. That is all very well, but what the Government are offering as a positive recipe is, in a nutshell, a reinvention of the wheel. Since craftsmanship has declined slightly, the reinvention of the wheel is obviously not being done with the expertise that it might be.

Let me point out certain specifics. Years ago industry training boards existed. Then they disappeared. Now, in "Success for All", we have brand-new sector skills councils. Years ago local education authority careers advisers went into schools and talked to staff and careers masters. Now we have something new: Connexions personal advisers. They sound very similar. Years ago LEA advisers and Her Majesty's inspectors spread practice throughout the sector. Now we have LSCs, aided and abetted by Ministers, doing more or less the same thing.

Years ago further education colleges specialised in what they did best. They did not go in for the gratuitous hunting out of extra places and courses just to put bums on seats and funding in the budget. Now the Government will encourage further education colleges to specialise in what they do best. We all remember that, years ago, LEAs used to construct strategically relevant plans for technical and further education in cities and counties. Now LSCs will do precisely the same thing. So there is nothing specifically and wonderfully new about the outline proposals.

The drive to get rid of bureaucracy is encouraging. I understand that Sir George Sweeney and his committee are eradicating bureaucracy throughout the country. I checked with my own further education establishments and they are only marginally aware of his existence. The hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) mentioned a number of quangos that are adding to the bureaucracy or, at any rate, employ a good number of bureaucrats. The document states helpfully that if the LSC and the LSDA collaborate sufficiently with the LEAs, the SSCs, the SSDAs, the RDAs, the HEFCE, the HEI and the SPCEF within a meaningful FRESA—which I understand only vaguely—there will be more CoVEs and use of Ufi ICT, which should please QCA, ALP and most of FE. All of those acronyms—apart from being my attempt to win the *Hansard* competition for the largest number of acronyms in a sentence—are to be found in the document. I am sceptical about the Government's instinct to discourage bureaucracy. I see little evidence so far that they have actually succeeded in doing so.

What the Government have added in terms of bureaucracy is an additional three-year development plan, although one might describe it as a contract. I do not have any hang-ups about that, and I suggest that the Minister and the Government have made progress in suggesting that a development plan is something that is agreed on a local basis with an LSC. That is far better than the Government's simply thrusting something on them, or setting targets that mean nothing to them. My anxiety is that if the targets are not interpreted and implemented sensitively enough, good performance may not be rewarded. There may instead simply be mystification all round.

The Government have laid out some of the targets in "Success for All" in terms of student numbers. I am sure that any LSC would be aware that increasing student numbers per se is not a good thing if the courses that they are pursuing are not meaningful and useful.

Employer engagement is another matter that colleges will be rated on. However, that will vary across the country depending on the situation of the local employers. In areas that are depressed, where employers have their backs against the wall and have real difficulties in making ends meet, there will be limited scope to engage them. I would not want to see any college suffer because it was in an economically deprived area.

Staff calibre is another factor that colleges will be rated on. Presumably, colleges that uprate the quality of their staff will be better rewarded than colleges that do not. It seems self-evident to me that in the south-east, that will be more of a problem. People who are highly qualified in technical skills will find it easier to go elsewhere than the local FE college, and for better money. It seems to me that any plan put across by the LSC should be sensitively interpreted, as it determines funding.

My worry—I hope that the Minister will take it seriously—is that the targets for colleges could end up being highly specific, and almost penal in some respects. The targets in the introductory section of "Success for All", which the Government actually set for themselves, are described as tough, but they are completely and utterly unquantified. They simply refer to more people at a certain level, or say that they hope to increase numbers. The document does not state by how much. There is something rather unfair about the Government's setting nebulous, rather indefinite goals for themselves while setting severe goals for the colleges, upon which funding hinges.

Equally imprecise are the financial commitments. The Minister is certainly very welcome to respond by clarifying what may be a misunderstanding on my part. Several hon. Members have already raised points about the salary gap, which is a big issue for all FE colleges, sixth form colleges and the like. One would look in the document for something that would bridge that gap and state the intention to employ people at the same rates at LEA 11-18 schools. The document says that the Government would hope to, and that they would like to. It says that the money might be there to achieve it, but it does not actually guarantee it.

I do not doubt that there is additional money. There has been a 3.5 per cent. increase in real terms. However, I want to make a slightly semantic point. As I understand it—hon. Members may correct me—that 3.5 per cent. has come from the merging of two funds that are already received by the colleges. That is a very curious definition of an increase. There is an additional 2 per cent. of funding coming as well, but that is conditional on agreeing a plan with an LSC. Clearly, if a plan is not agreed, or it is not a satisfactory plan, or there is a very demanding LSC, that funding may not be there.

I applaud and respect the Government for providing an extra 60 per cent. for capital spending, but the document says elsewhere that the Treasury expects colleges to seek additional sources of money, either through a private finance initiative or borrowing from elsewhere. If that 60 per cent. is handed out as capital funding on a match basis, the Government may simply be giving colleges an opportunity to acquire further debts. More detail is required.

Finally on the financial side, there is an entirely praiseworthy Government initiative on the integration of the 14-to-19 curriculum in schools and that in further education. Pupils move happily between both types of establishment and will continue to do so. However, it is not clear—perhaps the Minister will make it clear—how, in the long term, that funding will be arranged. Will it come predominantly from the local authority, or will it be part of the LSC budget relating to the further education college? Will it be split between the two? Will it come via a special grant, on a continuous basis?

I applaud many of the initiatives. The emphasis on e-learning is good. I welcome modern apprenticeships and appreciate the emphasis on relating adult learning to employability, which is quite important. However, I note certain omissions. There is very little about the civic education of people who go through further education. In the old technical colleges, there used to be a traditional vein of liberal education, whereby someone who had a technical education was not excluded from an understanding of the wider aspects of society. We all recognise that as important.

The Government are bothered about the problem, but the Department is overlooked by the Treasury and therefore handicapped. The Government need to accept that, attractive and detailed in certain respects as the brochures are, the further education colleges will, given the history of further education funding, view them with scepticism and want to examine the fine detail. I did not attend the conference that other hon. Members did, but in my local further education colleges the champagne is still very much on ice.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr. David Amess (in the Chair): Order. The Minister will take only a short while to sum up the debate, but five hon. Members are still trying to catch my eye. It would be appreciated if hon. Members would bear that in mind.

4.17 pm

Valerie Davey (Bristol, West): I am pleased to take part in this debate on an important policy statement, and I am delighted that my hon. Friend the Minister for Lifelong Learning and Higher Education will speak to "Success for All". Unlike the Opposition spokesperson, I pay credit to the Minister's consistency, because as Chair of the then Select Committee on Education and Employment she presented to the House the earlier further education report that is echoed in many aspects of today's report.

The recommendations of the earlier report have largely been fulfilled. There are many important echoes. It states:

> "The further education sector supports the nation's economic competitiveness and social well-being."

That is about social justice and economic development.

That Committee, with its long experience of work and a long time spent visiting colleges, came up with the conclusion, which we knew all along, that further money was needed, and in the core sector. That is now being responded to. There was a need for further capital investment, which is being responded to.

There was the important claim that, whatever we did for the colleges, we also had to do something for 16-plus students. The educational maintenance allowances being rolled out throughout the country are one of the finest things that the Department and the Government have done for young people in education.

Let us return to the current report. I cannot believe that the Minister has not consciously and subconsciously taken on board many of its themes in the Department and seen them through. It was an excellent report, and it makes me proud to have been a member of that Committee. For those of us who have treasured our role on Select Committees over the years, we believe that it was a job well done when we see how that work has been translated in due time into a policy statement and into pounds in the pockets of colleges and students. I thank the Minister for her work and, importantly, for the new report.

[Valerie Davey]

I pay tribute to the report through the voice of Brian Styles, the principal of the City of Bristol college, whom I rang for an immediate response to the document. Before I tell the Committee what he said, I shall say a little about the college, which is the third largest in the country. If some members of the Committee do not recognise it, they may remember Brunel college of technology, South Bristol college, or Sandwell college of further and higher education and the nursery nurses' college in Bristol. Brian Styles has smoothly and adeptly brought together those colleges as the City of Bristol college, which now provides excellent education for 35,000 students from different parts of the region, Britain and overseas. Its work in linking with schools, commerce and industry, and three universities is an example to many others.

Brian Styles' first comment on the report was that it is a great step forward in funding, but that almost equally important are the great resources that the Government are giving to colleges in recognition of their importance and the variety of their work. The report is recognition of their contribution to the economic and social values in this country and a ringing endorsement, although I am sure that he, I and everyone else present want to see the detail and to know how it will be implemented. Interestingly, Brian Styles then focused on the importance that the document gives to the 14-to-19 agenda.

Not for nothing has Brian Styles created the City of Bristol college. He is concerned about every aspect of education in the city. He is well aware of the lack of attendance of some of the senior members of the college, and of their need for a more flexible agenda and to link into what the college can offer. He provides some 1,000 youngsters from school with half a day every week, which means that 1,000 youngsters receive that advantage without any additional funding to the college. That is a possible way of linking them to further education in future. He was concerned that the schools, especially those whose youngsters are not achieving the A stars at GCSE level, are putting so much effort into the target of 30 per cent. or more achievement that they may not recognise that one of their targets should be to let young people achieve and go on to further education, with or without GCSEs. He, and others in Westminster Hall today, would echo the statement of the need to recognise that many young people learn through their hands and doing. They need skilled help to further their education through courses that may not even be vocational GCSEs, but general national vocational qualifications, which the college enthusiastically offers. The variety of stimulation that those young people need is a huge part of that principal's agenda, despite the fact that many of his students are also taking higher education courses, gaining degrees and going on to university. The curriculum issue—the 14-to-19 agenda—is very much upfront at the college.

The principal welcomed the money that he will now be able to pay. He said that in the past he had been able to take people from business and industry who, at a certain stage of their career, wanted to use their skills and experience to become FE lecturers, and not just for one day a week. He has been prohibited from doing so recently, but he is looking forward to again being able to employ in FE people who have had a career in business and industry.

Mr. Kerry Pollard (St. Albans): Does my hon. Friend agree that in the main FE colleges want to raise their game? What the Government have done recently will allow them to do that. Oaklands college in my constituency is training plumbers and bricklayers, which is what we need.

Valerie Davey: That is a good point, well—and often—made by my hon. Friend.

The City of Bristol college produces some good people with crafts and skills and recently it has received two accolades. The college has won two major national awards—the further education Oscars—one for innovation in language teaching. I hope that the Department will soon extend its policy on language teaching in schools and I remind Ministers how important that role is for further education.

The college was given the accolade because of its dynamic languages staff, who offer a wide range of options, including Mandarin Chinese, modern Greek, Russian and Punjabi. As some of my hon. Friends know, the bee in my bonnet is that young people who come to this country whose mother tongue is not English, but who grow up to excel in it, are asked to take French and German when they go to secondary school or into further education, rather than studying their own mother tongue. How good it would be if they were able to pursue their Arabic, Persian, Punjabi or Gujerati, to give themselves credits, to have pride in their own language and to enrich this country and its future trade.

The second Oscar was for engineering training, which shows the balance of values at the college. The prestige of a beacon engineering award was mainly to recognise the college's superb engineering skills department centre.

I want to highlight the insight involved in acquiring a new building on a city centre site near the harbourside, where there is some prestigious development, and in making it a showcase for its work. Young people are flooding there to do computer courses and hairdressing and to acquire a range of skills. The college restaurant is in a lovely open area where elderly people and youngsters in the community come to eat. It has recently been open for art exhibitions for the homeless, and for Studio Upstairs, which takes people recovering from alcohol and drug abuse and from mental illness. It is a superb facility for the city.

I want to place on the record my well-known enthusiasm for further education and to pay a personal tribute on behalf of the people of Bristol to Brian Styles, who retires at the end of the year. As principal, he has taken forward the work of FE with great enthusiasm and provided the city with something that it can be proud of, from which many people of all ages have been able to benefit.

I endorse the blue paper "Success for All". The City of Bristol college has led many people to success. I wish the Minister success in fully implementing all that has been set out.

4.29 pm

Mr. John Horam (Orpington): I thank the Chairman of the Education and Skills Committee for at least giving birth to the debate, even though the child that was delivered was the result of the Government's force majeure, and not entirely the one that he had in mind. I am delighted that further education is the subject of the debate. I, like the hon. Gentleman, deplore instances such as this when the Government hijack Select Committee time. As Committee Chairmen—I am Chairman of the Environmental Audit Committee—and Back Benchers know, the most effective criticism of Government policy comes from the work of Select Committees but their reports must be debated either in Westminster Hall or in the Chamber. It is a pity when the Government take that time unilaterally and late in the day.

Orpington college in my constituency is a remarkable further education college. I am glad that my hon. Friend the Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell) has since the summer returned to his responsibilities for further education on the shadow Front Bench. He visited Orpington college and shares my view that it is excellent. Proof of that excellence is its A-level pass marks, which took it into the top 10 in the country. Its vocational course results are also well above average.

Orpington college had a successful Ofsted inspection this year and recently it received a charter mark for its excellent work, which I was honoured to be asked to present. When I was charter mark Minister in the last Government, charter marks were handed out by the Prime Minister of the day to all public servants who had done outstanding work on their own behalf or on behalf of institutions in health, education and so on. It is a pity that that practice has been dropped. I hope that the Minister will make that point to his Cabinet Office colleagues.

As the Minister conceded, further education colleges do excellent work, especially in reaching out to their surrounding communities. The education college in my constituency is active in that respect, providing adult literacy and computer courses and helping the large traveller community in Orpington. I agree with the Minister that further education colleges do valuable work for communities and Orpington college works hard in that respect.

It is remarkable that such good work is done with such slender resources, as the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) said. Teachers in FE colleges are less well paid than the equivalent teachers in schools. The resources available to further education colleges are significantly less—to the tune of nearly 40 per cent.—than those available to schools. They do not get the free capital investment in infrastructure that schools automatically expect. As my hon. Friend the Member for Daventry said, they are remarkable value for money in terms of public expenditure.

I am pleased to welcome the Government's statement on further funding for FE colleges and warmly welcome the "light blue paper". After some controversy about the origin of the light blue colour, the Minister tried to get away with pretending that it was some sort of design choice. I like to think of it as a political statement in the sense that in several sectors—especially health and education—the Government are drifting inexorably under the reality of events towards a more blue view of things. I hope that that will continue, although some of the Minister's more red-blooded colleagues seem to object to it, certainly in the case of health.

I draw the Minister's attention briefly to three matters. First, she admitted that the process of acquiring funds for further education colleges was excessively bureaucratic and could defeat some of the purposes on which they had set their heart.

I notice in the light blue paper the encouraging statement that

"current targeted funds for pay and for staff training will be consolidated into core funding to reduce bureaucracy and devolve decision-making to the front line."

That is an important statement, which I totally welcome. I hope that it will be translated into action.

A curious anomaly is that the starter home initiative for key workers extends only to school teachers; it does not extend to teachers in FE colleges.

Margaret Hodge: It does now.

Mr. Horam: I am very glad to hear that, because that information has not percolated through to all in FE colleges. There is still an apprehension that in that respect, teachers are getting a better deal than FE teachers. I am glad that the Minister says that that is not the case.

Mr. Pollard: The advice given on those matters is that the local authority can define who its key workers are. In my area, we have included almost everyone, because anyone can be a key worker—if we cannot get dustbin emptiers, they are key workers.

Mr. Horam: I received a negative ministerial answer on that earlier in the year, so there has obviously been a U-turn. I have that answer in front of me, and it says that the provision was to be for school teachers only, not FE teachers. I am very glad that there has been that U-turn and that FE teachers will be considered for help with housing, because that is important in areas such as mine, Bromley.

Finally, on something that is not the Minister's direct responsibility, but which I hope that she will draw to the attention of her colleagues or even the Mayor of London, students can get discounts on buses and tubes but not railways. When there has to be quite a lot of travelling around, and people come from quite long distances, in an area such as Bromley, not getting travel discounts across the board can be a disincentive.

The most important of the points that I have made is that on core funding, and the ability to use funding across the board, rather than its being sectioned off into silos and not transferable. That is critical. However, bearing in mind the points that I have made, I welcome what the Government appear to be doing. As my hon. Friend the Member for Daventry said, Governments are good on words. Let us see that, in this case, they are also good on action.

4.37 pm

Mr. David Chaytor (Bury, North): I welcome the fact that we are having this debate today, regardless of the circumstances of its gestation. I associate myself with

[Mr. David Chaytor]

the important remarks of the Chair of the Select Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman), that we must ensure that the Committee's report on higher education gets its fair share of parliamentary time.

I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Minister, who made an excellent opening statement summarising the contents of the blue paper. For everyone involved in further education, this is an extremely important day, as was Tuesday, when my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State made his speech. I also pay tribute to my close colleague, the Under-Secretary of State for Education and Skills, my hon. Friend the Member for Bury, South (Mr. Lewis), for his commitment to the further education sector during his time as a Minister. His role has been important, and he has succeeded in encouraging many people in the sector, persuading them that the tide was turning and, as I said earlier, a new dawn breaking.

I know that the Government do not want to talk about a graduate tax and top-up fees at the moment, but I intend to do that and make no apologies for it. If the Government had not taken the bold decision to reform the student support system for higher education in 1998, there would not now be £1.2 billion extra for further education between next year and 2005–06. The corollary of that is that if the Government do not take the next, necessary, bold step of reforming student support in HE in January, beyond 2005–06 there will be no new money for FE.

Mr. Pollard: Is my hon. Friend aware that a recent early-day motion on top-up fees—I know that we are not talking about those—has attracted about 80 signatures already?

Mr. Chaytor: I am aware of that, and I must say that I think the Labour Members who have signed that motion are misguided in their judgment. I hope that during the next few weeks we shall have a lively debate, trying to prove to my colleagues that they have got the wrong end of the stick.

That brings me to my important opening point. I hope that the Government will feel that it is important to encourage the widest possible debate in Parliament before the publication in January of the paper—whatever its colour—on HE. It would be wrong simply to publish the Government's intentions without having prepared the ground in Parliament.

I want to make a few observations on the speech of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. I can testify that, as the hon. Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell) said, it went down extremely well with those attending the AOC conference earlier in the week. The Secretary of State gave a great boost to morale in the FE sector. I was disappointed that the hon. Member for Daventry somewhat blew our cover by admitting that we were only at the conference dinner, not there for the whole time. Nevertheless, it was an important moment for education.

I particularly welcome the fact that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State allocated £1.2 billion and stated that there will be year-on-year increases that will serve substantially to narrow the gap between the FE sector and the schools sector. However, it is not clear exactly what that substantial narrowing is. In July, my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced his spending review, in which FE was allocated a 1 per cent. a year increase and the schools sector—specifically the education standard spending assessment—was given a 3.5 per cent. increase. Afterwards—she may or may not recall this—I spoke to my hon. Friend the Minister in the Tea Room. I asked her how, if we are committed as a Government to convergence of funding for 16 to 19-year-olds, it can be the case that spending on FE is increasing by 1 per cent. and the education SSA for schools is increasing by 3.5 per cent. To some extent we were given the answer this week in the speech on the blue paper, but it is not yet completely clear. We need to know exactly how far the funding gap will be substantially narrowed.

We need also to know not only what the headline totals are, but what will happen to the funding methodology. Convergence of 16-to-19 funding—which is important not only for the pay of FE teachers and lecturers, but for the general resource base of colleges—will be achieved only if the funding methodology is changed. I hope that the Minister will be able to say something in her closing remarks, or in the near future, about how the LSC is making the transition from the former Further Education Funding Council's methodology to a new common unified funding methodology that applies equally to sixth forms in schools and to colleges.

I welcome many of the specifics in the speech and the blue paper. Earlier we spoke briefly about the importance of the professional development of further education staff. That is an important priority, albeit with the proviso that there is occasionally a need to bring in people who have a high level of expertise but will never have formal teaching qualifications.

I welcome the honesty of the remarks of my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to the conference. In announcing the totals for the first year, he immediately said that it was not new money but a readjustment of existing budgets. That must be the first time for many years that a Minister has been so honest to such an important audience. I also welcome the honesty about the future role of the learning and skills councils and his acceptance of the criticism that has been levelled over the past two years at the amount of bureaucracy in the LSCs and the degree of expertise in them. It is a crucial priority for the Government to keep an eye on the relationship between the LSCs and the colleges and to consider staffing expertise in the LSCs. If they are now to have responsibility for the strategic area reviews, and for the support of and intervention into the 10 per cent. of colleges that we assume will not go through the thresholds and will continue to struggle, a considerable injection of new further education expertise into local LSCs will be required.

I welcome the recognition of the bureaucracy that is involved. I was not aware of the bureaucracy taskforce. I hope that its report will not be too long and does not destroy too many trees. I noted in the blue paper that the Secretary of State is due to respond to the bureaucracy taskforce's report in November 2002, and it is important that that response is in the public domain to allow us all to take a view on the extent to which the Government are reducing bureaucracy in FE.

I particularly welcome the focus on teaching and learning, and the establishment of the standards unit in the Department for Education and Skills. On the establishment of the standards unit, page 31 of the blue paper states:

"It will be important to learn as we go."

I could not decide whether that is refreshing honesty or the understatement of the century because for a number of years there has not been the slightest degree of understanding about the FE sector within the Department. One of the most important achievements by the former Secretary of State, my right hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Yardley (Estelle Morris), which is being continued by the current Secretary of State, is the standards unit, which will start to second people who know what happens in FE colleges to work in the Department. Such units have worked very effectively in primary, secondary and pre-school education, and the unit will be a great boost to the future development of teaching and learning in FE.

Having generally welcomed all the things that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has said and published in the blue paper, I shall flag up some points that I hope will be given further consideration. On modern apprenticeships and work-based learning, over the past 12 months there has been considerable public debate—about 12 months ago there was a high level of public debate—including interviews on "Today" and exchanges of letters between the chair and chief executive of the LSC and Ministers about the quality of teaching and learning within FE colleges. The figures are indisputable. The reports from the first new inspections, albeit carried out on a different basis from the former Further Education Funding Council's inspections, identified some serious concerns.

Equally, during the past few months we have had the report from the chief of the adult learning inspectorate. His report on inspections of work-based learning showed an almost identical proportion of work-based learning providers who were subject to re-inspection. There has been no debate about the severe limitations in the quality of much of our work-based learning, which is partly because institutions still largely dominate our understanding of education. The academic-vocational divide, which still plagues our education service, is partly responsible for work-based learning being seen as less prestigious and for people not knowing what goes on and not wanting to talk about it—people want endlessly to talk about anything to do with A-levels.

I ask my hon. Friend the Minister to read seriously the report of the chief inspector of the adult learning inspectorate, and give equal attention to the quality of work-based learning providers as she has done to quality in FE colleges. There is an interesting point in the blue paper about the work of the Qualification and Curriculum Authority on the unitisation of the curriculum. I have always thought that there is a strange sense of priority whereby we have accepted for many years in the university sector that the curriculum would be unitised, but increasingly most, if not all, of our universities operate some form of credit accumulation and transfer system, which is better developed in some universities than others.

Having established a system in the universities sector, we started to examine A-levels. As we know, we have had significant curriculum change in A-levels over the past few years. We now have Curriculum 2000 whereby the curriculum has been unitised on a six-unit structure. The argument for unitising the curriculum and for establishing credit accumulation and transfer procedures is that it helps to motivate students. The irony is that we started with the most highly motivated students in the universities and worked downwards to the next most highly motivated students taking O-levels. We ignored completely the needs of the least motivated students who drop out of school from 13 or 14 and onwards, some of who go on to FE colleges. We should have done it the other way around. There is a powerful argument for unitising the curriculum and developing credit accumulation and transfer systems within schools and FE colleges. I hope that that will become a stronger theme in the development of the 14-to-19 curriculum.

The blue paper says explicitly that there are no plans to go back to national pay scales. I regret that. I understand exactly what has been attempted in devolving responsibility for pay and conditions to individual colleges since 1993, but I believe that it has been a disaster. Obviously, I welcome what the Government have done to rebuild morale in the sector. Industrial relations are certainly completely different from what they were five years ago. Nevertheless, to the best of my knowledge, the FE colleges remain the only area of the public services that do not have national scales for pay and conditions. That is an anomaly.

Mr. Pollard: Would my hon. Friend say how we would recruit in my area, where the cost of housing is three or four times what it is in other parts of the country, if we went to a national pay scale?

Mr. Chaytor: Employers in the south-east would recruit in exactly the same way that other public sector employers recruit for schools, the national health service and the fire service. There must be a recognised top-up for areas that have higher housing costs, but that does not undermine the argument for national pay scales.

That is one of the ways that the attempt to create a quasi market in the FE service has gone horribly wrong. It serves no continuing purpose to have pay and conditions devolved to individual colleges, and as long as we allow it there will be what can best be described as turbulence within the FE sector and completely unnecessary moving around of staff from one college to another in an attempt to get a better deal. I flag that up as something that might be revisited in the blue paper of three or four years hence.

On the national skills strategy, I differ from my hon. Friend the Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) in his earlier remarks about ILAs. In his capacity as Chairman of the Select Committee, he said that members of the Select Committee had been unanimous in the desire to see ILA mark 2 come back quickly. I have had a brief discussion with him before about the matter, in which I said that I disagreed. The Under-Secretary of State for Education and Skills, my hon. Friend the Member for Bury, South, has done absolutely the right thing in deferring a decision on individual learning accounts and in ruling them out in the development of a national strategy. It may well be that the national strategy could be written after a couple of days and an away-day. Nevertheless, we have set June as the target, and we must work to it.

[Mr. Chaytor]

The ILA was a wonderful idea, but it was not thought through properly. The people who were charged with planning it did not have practical experience of how such things worked. It was not their fault; that was the job that they were given. At the end of the day, the concept of an ILA was ditched, and it worked instead as a simple fee remission system. I am all in favour of such a system, but I see no point in dressing it up as something that it is not. We must now consider the best way to use the money that was earmarked for ILAs. I wish to flag up one way in which the Government might think about that.

Two years ago, I introduced a Bill to promote paid educational leave. My hon. Friend the Minister may recall it, as I have referred to it on several occasions. There is a national campaign for paid educational leave. Virtually every group of professional workers has paid educational leave as a right. The only people who cannot get it are those who need it most: the unskilled and semi-skilled workers at the bottom of the pile. Many European countries have established a system of leave for educational training with, for example, a minimum number of days of entitlement.

The Cabinet Office taskforce on work force development established the principle of paid educational leave in pilot areas. I think that my right hon. Friend the Chancellor provided some funding in the previous Budget for those pilot schemes. I know that the LSC's report on work force development has been published recently, or is due shortly, and I do not know what that says about paid educational leave. It certainly seems to me that, when examining how to deal with the legacy of individual learning accounts, transferring that money into a national scheme for paid educational leave targeted at low-paid workers would be of enormous benefit, and would help to transform the skills gap in this country.

Finally, on page 20 of the blue paper, the word "coherence" appears. It is the first time in 10 years that I have seen the word in any document about FE. That is the good news. The bad news is that it does not appear again, but I hope that it will. I welcome many of the statements in the paper about the need for a little more planning, co-operation and collaboration. The key mechanism for achieving that is the establishment of strategic area reviews.

I notice that the first review will start from 1 April 2003. I do not know whether the person who chose that date had an eye on history, but it will be exactly 10 years since the implementation of the Further and Higher Education Act 1992 and the incorporation of FE colleges. That led to a series of champagne breakfasts in some colleges celebrating their incorporation and, further, to the ending of the careers of many good people, the break-up of the health of many good people who had worked in FE and the jailing of some others. I hope that we can put the period of the quasi enterprise culture in the FE sector behind us and look forward to more collaboration, more partnership and more planning. I hope also that strategic area reviews can be given some teeth. There is no question but that there is still far too much useless competition and unnecessary duplication in the sector. I hope as well that in the blue paper of 2005–06, the word "coherence" will appear many more times than in this one.

4.56 pm

David Wright (Telford): I have a confession to make: I did not realise that this afternoon's debate was taking place until this lunchtime, so I am grateful that you have called me, Mr. Amess, to contribute to a very important debate.

I was sitting in the Tea Room eating a rather large plate of bacon and eggs, and my mind drifted back to a day in the summer when I visited Telford college of arts and technology and had an excellent tour given by the college principal, Mr. Doug Boynton, and a look at the fantastic new building created on the college's site in Wellington. I remember a commitment that I gave Doug Boynton over a cup of tea and some biscuits, which I consumed with vigour, that I would come and speak on FE issues, if I had the opportunity. I therefore hotfooted it to Westminster Hall this afternoon, and I appreciate the opportunity to contribute.

As hon. Members can tell from my opening remarks, I am always one to give into temptation, and there is a temptation on occasions such as this to talk about one's own college or FE institution. I shall now do that, if hon. Members will bear with me for a few moments.

The Telford college of arts and technology is a general FE college covering Telford and east Shropshire. It has a student population in excess of 16,000, with 1,200 full-time students. One of the college's great principles is that it is committed to widening participation, engaging people who would not normally participate in FE. Indeed, more than 50 per cent. of its enrolments are from the most deprived areas of Telford. I am proud of that. It is extremely important to give people from deprived communities opportunities to move into further and higher education, and I think that the Government have done a tremendous amount to ensure that that is possible and can continue.

We have heard a little this afternoon about the provision of training on employers' premises and the importance of ensuring that employers are signed up to high-quality training packages and skill development. I am pleased to say that more than 40 per cent. of the learning provided and delivered by Telford college of arts and technology is delivered on employers' premises and in community centres throughout Telford. It is important to reflect on that.

Many people living in deprived communities find it difficult to access FE colleges because of transport problems and other family difficulties. It is therefore important that we take learning out of the formal buildings of FE institutions and into community centres and other settings. In doing so, it is important that we do not devalue the quality of that education. We must ensure that those who attend community-based learning feel that they are receiving a high-quality product. That is incredibly important, as much so in Telford as in a number of other communities.

It is important to remember that Telford college of arts and technology received more accolades and awards for its provision than any other college in the United Kingdom, and I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak about it. The college is one of the

largest employers in the town, employing about 600 people, who have a large amount of spending power in the local economy. We should reflect on that when we discuss the way in which we manage FE provision in future. It provides not only education and skills for local people but job opportunities, and it ensures spending power in local economies.

It is important to reflect on some of the difficulties that FE colleges have encountered over recent years. Successive Governments have failed to address the most important aspect relating to the quality and sustainability of FE, which is core funding. It is good to hear the Minister talk about changing the climate of core funding, and about other developments such as how core funding will be handled in future. I hope that when she replies she will give us further commitment to a long-term approach to the issue.

Historically, colleges have been funded at about £1,000 per student less than a school sixth-form college, which is not sustainable in the long term. Furthermore, schools have a guarantee that their funding will not decrease, but FE colleges have no commensurate guarantee. I hope that that will be considered in the next few years. The settlement on which my hon. Friend the Minister has focused relates to a limited period. I hope also that in future we can ensure that further guarantees exist for long-term investment in core funding for FE institutions.

The second of a range of difficulties for FE colleges is pay. Pay increases have had to be funded for about 10 years by efficiency gains. No fully funded award has come from government in the past 10 years. In this week's announcement, we have taken major steps forward on pay, which I am pleased to see the trade unions have acknowledged. We must continue to make further commitments on pay for college lecturers. FE lecturers have historically received some £3,000 a year less than schoolteachers; they have shorter holidays, they teach more hours and they have a longer working week. I hope that we can bring some of the flexibilities to which the Minister referred to bear on the important role of FE lecturers while rewarding them properly.

The third difficulty is bureaucracy. We have heard much about that this afternoon. The principals that I have talked to, including Doug Boynton, suggested to me that the sector has been literally strangled by bureaucracy over the years. Multitudes of agencies, various funding streams and an enormous number of audit trails have been involved. In many cases, those contribute little to the education of people on the front line.

I am very much aware that FE colleges are constantly bidding for resources—Doug Boynton suggested that he spends most of his time putting together bids for resources for different pockets and parcels of money. It is therefore good to hear that we are to begin to mainstream more resources into the FE sector to reduce time spent by lecturers and principals on finding and bidding for resources, and increase time spent on the front line of teaching.

Finally on difficulties, I shall mention curriculum and assessment. We have a post-16 curriculum that involves too much formal assessment. Examining boards are often creaking under strain and disillusioned students are weary of taking exam after exam. People often come into Telford college of arts and technology with a very low skills base, so the college has to put them on an examination treadmill early on in their FE experience. We need to change that perspective to be more flexible in how we teach people in an FE setting and suit courses to them.

Reference was made to the expense of practical vocational training. A friend of mine who is an FE college lecturer in plumbing told me that he has to demonstrate some plumbing techniques using toilet rolls because he has insufficient resources to enable him to provide the physical fabric that he needs in order to teach. That is not appropriate now.

Having outlined a number of challenges for the future, I shall conclude my remarks. It is important to get the FE sector right, because it links to a wider agenda in which I am very interested, which is urban renewal. If we are to improve people's quality of life, especially in areas such as Telford, it is important to give them opportunities to acquire skills and to enhance their earning power, thus enabling them to contribute successfully to their local communities. It is also important in a town such as Telford to ensure that the skills base allows us to link our FE activity to industrial and manufacturing renewal. Given the Minister's opening remarks, I feel that that is now a core element of the Government's strategy. I am keen to hear what she has to say about urban renewal when she concludes the debate.

5.6 pm

Mr. Khalid Mahmood (Birmingham, Perry Barr): Before I speak, I declare a non-pecuniary interest in that I am a member of the governing body of my local city college.

In light of the speech made by the Secretary of State at the Association of Colleges annual conference in Birmingham, I welcome the statement that the AOC made on Tuesday, following its meeting with the trade unions national joint forum, in which it announced that it was suspending its strike action and resuming pay negotiations. That is what we want to see—a constructive way forward for the whole sector—and I congratulate the AOC. I also congratulate the Secretary of State on having taken a positive approach in moving forward through negotiations and discussions with the sector.

The further education sector has predominantly been seen as a Cinderella sector, which, since its incorporation in 1992, has jumped from one crisis to another. It has always been made to chase after different pots of funding, with different types of awards attributed to it. The hon. Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell) said that his Government made wonderful progress in directing funding towards it. The demand-led element has always been liable to be cut overnight, with no provision made for students or staff. That is the ongoing scenario that the FE sector has had to deal with.

The FE sector has made a tremendous contribution to the communities and environments of which it is a part. Local colleges have played a significant role in economic regeneration and social inclusion in their areas. They have started to build and to integrate communities—as my hon. Friend the Member for

[Mr. Khalid Mahmood]

Bristol, West (Valerie Davey) said, not only in terms of available subjects but by providing mother tongue teaching. We have colleges in Birmingham that have delivered excellent results for children in Urdu, Punjabi, Gujerati and Hindi. For people living in those communities, that enhances their ability to understand who and what they are. Once they have attained self-confidence in understanding the heritage and culture of their parents, they can far better integrate into the main stream of society and move forward. The colleges provide the bedrock of support for that. "Success for All" outlines the way that the Government want to move forward. I commend the fact that we are looking at a rise of £1.2 billion by 2005–06. I also commend the fact that three-year plans are coming into being to allow colleges to move their budgets forward on a cyclical basis rather than jumping from one crisis to another.

I also welcome the capital funding for projects in colleges. Most colleges, particularly in Birmingham, have been in their buildings for 50 to 60 years. Most were not designed for the present day and the kind of classes that have to be run, particularly for information and communications technology, drama and other arts-based projects. Core craft skills such as plumbing, electrical installation, bricklaying and block paving need to be developed. Those skills are especially important in Birmingham, which is currently undergoing the largest development that it has seen for some time. We have to ship people into Birmingham to provide courses in basic skills such as bricklaying, pipefitting, plumbing and electrical installation. Those are the core skills that we have been proud of in the West Midlands for a long time. We need a strategic view on how we deliver that training. We need to deliver it in the colleges of excellence, particularly in view of the bid that Birmingham has now put together.

I further congratulate the colleges in Birmingham and the learning and skills councils. They have moved forward and stopped competing and fighting one another for the resources that have been available. They have got together and looked at a new construction college for the whole of Birmingham to teach all those who so desperately need to acquire the skills that are in such short supply in Birmingham.

I gather that time is running out. I need to leave some time for the Minister and for the Opposition spokesman to wind up. I want to concentrate on bureaucracy, which has been mentioned by the Minister. I welcome Sir George Sweeney's review. Colleges currently have to go through about 42 audits a year. They include the Ofsted inspections, area reviews, learning and skills councils audits and student records, financial audits, system audits, quality audits, Learndirect inspections, Learndirect audits, franchise audits, new deal reviews and audits, modern apprenticeship reviews, audits and inspections, European social fund audits and LSC provider reviews.

I agree with the Minister that for far too long we have had no accountability in further education. I also believe that there is a strong case for cross-agency integration on some of these audits and inspections. We need to cut down some of this bureaucracy. That is what the colleges want. Colleges currently have to pay in the region of 400 person days in audits per year to deal with it. That is a tremendous amount to take away from the chalk face in the classroom. We should concentrate our resources on the people who matter. Those are the people who come through the door and who want that education.

I wanted briefly to discuss accreditation reform, on which Alan Birks, John Rudd and his colleagues at Oxford Cambridge and RSA Examinations presented a paper to the AOC conference in Birmingham. The proposals seek to determine how they can reform accreditations to create structures of delivery from mathematics and engineering to technology and construction. I would certainly be interested if the Minister and her Department took up some of the findings of that paper.

The authors want to examine the possibility of a matrix of entry levels ranging from entry and foundation courses to immediate and advanced courses, and to consider at least 14 learning areas to develop the diplomas throughout the range of qualifications available to the sector. We must also begin to consider integrating that into higher education, which is important to all of us, as has been said. The FE sector can play a vital role in delivering some of the agenda for the Government and in reaching a target of 50 per cent. in higher education.

I take a slightly different view from that of my hon. Friend the Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman), who is no longer in his place, on the role that he gave the FE sector. I believe that the FE sector can play a significant role in providing higher education. It fulfils that role quite well at the moment but needs to strengthen its formal links with higher education to provide a wider variety of services.

The paper also suggested the provision of a national qualifications framework, which, I believe, the QCA, the ACCAC, the CCAA, the CEA, the SQA and the QEAA are all considering. I must find out what all those abbreviations mean. At least the intention exists to consider how that can be achieved. Perhaps some of those institutions could start to work with other agencies, rather than considering the different ways of assessing the sector, in order to break down the bureaucracy that they themselves created.

Finally, the FE sector has provided a lifeline to those people who may not have had the best chances throughout their school life and who may have missed out on the opportunity to make something of their lives. When I finished school, I sat City and Guilds examinations at my local technical college and I got my ordinary national certificate. I then got an apprenticeship.

5.18 pm

Sitting suspended for a Division in the House.

5.38 pm

On resuming—

Mr. David Amess (in the Chair): Order. In light of the unusually long delay for the Division, and the confusion about a second vote, I have taken advice and it is in order to allow 12 more minutes for the end of the debate.

Mr. Mahmood: Thank you, Mr. Amess.

As I was saying before we hastily departed, I left school with CSEs as they were then; we now call them GCSEs. Luckily, I went to my local careers office and was able to go on an Engineering Industry Training Board training programme—a first year, off-the-job training programme—which landed me in what was Garatts Green technical college. It is now part of the city college of which I am a governor.

Having gone through the City and Guilds process and completed my apprenticeship, I progressed to a management course within a company that existed at the time. Unfortunately, it had to be wound up in 1986 due to the engineering recession, and I had to diverge from the industry.

We had such training colleges at that time, particularly technical colleges, and we need to consider moving back to technical colleges to provide the level of skills training that people need to provide services for future generations. I am talking about the electrical, building and bricklaying trades, and even something as common as block paving. I believe that people from eastern Europe had to be brought in to do block paving somewhere in Nelson, even though that skill can be taught in colleges in six weeks.

5.40 pm

Margaret Hodge: I am delighted that many hon. Members have had an opportunity to praise colleges in their constituency. They include my hon. Friends the Members for Bristol, West (Valerie Davey) and for Telford (David Wright), and the hon. Member for Orpington (Mr. Horam).

My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr (Mr. Mahmood) fulfils a role that is increasingly important in the further education sector, in that he chairs his local corporation. That is becoming more burdensome because of the complexity of the audit and inspection requirements that fall on colleges, as he demonstrated, so I am happy to share in the celebration of excellence in local colleges.

My hon. Friend the Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman) spoke about the fact that we were debating further education this afternoon. I have heard his views outside the Chamber and here, and we will reflect on them. I will have discussions with those who organise business in the House to ensure that there is proper debate on all issues that are of concern to the Select Committee. Those who know me well know how important I believe the proper airing of Select Committee reports on the Floor of the House or in Westminster Hall is to accountability.

The hon. Member for Daventry (Mr. Boswell), who spoke for the Opposition, said—I hope that I do not misquote him—that the AOC was not completely happy with what we had done. I should therefore like to place on the record what was said by David Gibson, the AOC chief executive—a man with whom I have not always agreed, as the hon. Gentleman knows. Mr. Gibson said:

"This funding package represents the best deal the college sector has ever had. It will reverse the financial cuts of the 1990s and place colleges on a firm financial basis for years to come."

That is a pretty ringing endorsement from someone who in the past has not always felt able to share our objectives and funding patterns.

A number of hon. Members asked whether the funding package would move us towards closing the gap. We were conscious, in putting together the funding for our invest and reform package, that we should go as far as we could to meet our manifesto commitment to increase the funding for the further education sector to the equivalent of that for schools. We have taken huge steps in that regard.

We cannot specify a figure. The reason is that, although we accept that the funding gap rate was about 10.5 per cent. before the existing package, and we know that the Learning and Skills Council will use the additional money to enable us to close the gap further, the LSC is committed to other objectives, such as our manifesto objective to sustain the funding for sixth forms. It must have regard to those complementary objectives in distributing the resources. However, I am sure that that funding will go a considerable way—much further than I expected in July—to close the funding gap, and that will be reflected in pay rates for staff in colleges. It really is a good package and although we cannot specify the figures I am pleased to place it before hon. Members today.

A number of hon. Members spoke about bureaucracy. My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr read through a list of audits that he has to go through. I recently presented our new Secretary of State with a list, four and a half pages long, of requirements for audit, inspection and information that FE colleges face. I can therefore assure my hon. Friend that we will take this exercise seriously. The different audit, inspection and information requirements are ridiculous and we have to make the system more sensible. We have taken the first steps towards cutting bureaucracy.

Mr. Pollard: On the subject of bureaucracy, is my hon. Friend aware that my local college—Oaklands college—is currently being blighted by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, which is calling in a planning application? It wants to list a concrete and glass building because of its method of construction, not because of its intrinsic value. Will my hon. Friend use her not inconsiderable powers of persuasion and tell the Secretary of State not to do it?

Margaret Hodge: I dread to tread in other people's territory, but I hear what my hon. Friend is saying.

As I say, we have taken the first steps. Three-year funding will lead to a cut in bureaucracy. The fact that we are consolidating a number of separate funds into the basic unit funding for further education will further ensure that we can cut bureaucracy. The LSC announced at the AOC conference the ending of the automatic audit of the individual student record. We are committed to implementing all the recommendations of Sir George Sweeney's bureaucracy taskforce. That taskforce is now looking at work-based learning providers. A lot is happening in this area, and a lot is left to do.

I want to pick up on some issues that hon. Members raised. The hon. Member for Daventry said that participation had not increased. I should like to place it on the record that that is not true. While we were getting rid of the way in which the previous Government

[Margaret Hodge]

counted the numbers—they increased their figures for students in further education by including, for example, competence in pulling of pints of beer as a qualification—the numbers remained static for some time. However, we have turned that around. In 2000–01, the LSC funding for full-time further education students went up by 4.8 per cent. on the previous year.

Mr. Boswell *rose—*

Margaret Hodge: I want to continue because I want to respond to points that other hon. Members have raised.

My hon. Friend the Member for Huddersfield raised the issue of boundaries between further education and higher education, saying that they were increasingly blurred. My hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr raised the same issue. I often talk about trying to square the circle, getting all our institutions—schools, colleges and universities—to focus on what they do best, but also blurring the boundaries between those institutions so that an individual student can progress and achieve his or her potential by following an appropriate route. Students should not be bound by institutional boundaries. I take the point that my hon. Friend the Member for Huddersfield made, and I also take his point about the importance of management in further education. We intend to tackle the latter issue with great vigour during the reform period.

The hon. Member for Southport (Dr. Pugh) raised the issue of acronyms, as did my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Perry Barr. Their points reminded me of the story of why I am called the Minister for Lifelong Learning and Higher Education, which I will tell quickly. At first, the Prime Minister called me the Minister for Higher Education. When I returned to my office, my right hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) rang me and said that I had to have "lifelong learning" in my title, to which I replied, "Don't worry, I'll call myself the Minister for Higher Education and Lifelong Learning". Then I realised that the acronym for that was HELL. I am very aware of acronyms, which is why the title was turned around.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, West spoke about the importance of ensuring that we recognise the distance travelled by an individual when assessing the quality of our further education institutions, which is crucial. It is a very difficult exercise, and I often tell further education college principals that what matters to individuals is the qualifications that they can present in the workplace. We must never run away from that ambition, but distance travelled is important. The role that further education can play in the 14-to-19 agenda is crucial.

I can assure the hon. Member for Orpington that the paper might be light blue but there is real clear red water between Opposition Members and us. That is reflected in the extent of the investment package that we are discussing. I do not think that further education has ever enjoyed such a large investment package, which will create huge opportunities.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bury, North (Mr. Chaytor) mentioned unitisation, which is very important. I assure him that we are examining work-based learning with intensity and vigour equal to that with which we examine further education. That subject, however, was not part of our debate.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bristol, West discussed the report of the Select Committee on Education and Employment. She and I worked together on that, and it was one of the best bits of work that we did while we were together on the Committee. The report was extremely thorough and although I have not gone back to it, it is heartening to see that much that we thought was important has been translated into plans and reality on the ground. We are proud of that. Collaboration, not competition, will inform our way forward.

It being nine minutes to Six o'clock, the motion for the Adjournment of the sitting lapsed, without Question put.

Written Ministerial Statements

Thursday 14 November 2002

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Gas Prices

The Minister for Energy and Construction (Mr. Brian Wilson): We have published today our conclusions on the operation of the GB gas market and concerns, especially from industrial consumers, on a marked increase in gas prices which occurred in 2000. We have carefully considered all the responses to the consultation and have found that the fundamental reason for movements in gas prices has been the influence of trade with continental Europe through the Interconnector pipeline, essential for the UK's winter gas requirements and future security of supply, as we become net importers.

The consultation produced no evidence to suggest anti-competitive behaviour nor to justify a competition investigation by the Office of Fair Trading or the European Commission. The consultation was useful in eliciting views about the operation of gas markets.

We recognise the difficulties that industrial consumers experienced with the rise of gas prices in 2000. To address this we are continuing to press for liberalisation and competition in energy markets both here and on the continent, and to then ensure that the inherent benefits are passed on to both industrial and domestic consumers. The complexity of the gas market means that we must seek to introduce greater transparency for the consumer. To this end we will continue to work closely with Ofgem, Transco and representatives of gas consumers, shippers and producers to increase understanding and clarity for all market participants.

The published response includes a summary of responses to the consultation. Copies have been placed in the libraries of both Houses.

Employment Tribunal System Taskforce

The Minister for Employment Relations, Industry and the Regions (Alan Johnson): With my right honourable and noble Friend the Lord Chancellor I have today published the government's response to "Moving Forward: The Report of the Employment Tribunal System Taskforce".

I have placed copies in the Library of the House and it is also available on the DTI's Employment relations website http://www.dti.gov.uk/er.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Fridge Disposal

The Minister for the Environment (Mr. Michael Meacher): Report number 109 has been laid today seeking agreement to the distribution of the £40 million funding for English local authorities through a special grant. We propose that the amount payable to an authority will be allocated according to the formula used for county services within the Environmental, Protective and Cultural Services SSA block, in the same manner that the previous allocation was calculated.

Our officials are writing to each local authority concerned with details of the special grant and the process by which they will receive their allocation.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Asylum Seekers

The Minister for Citizenship and Immigration (Beverley Hughes): Regulations were laid before Parliament on 21 October 2002 amending the Asylum Support Regulations 2000. The amendment, which came into effect on 11 November 2002, increased the level of support provided to dependants of asylum seekers aged under 16 who are supported by the National Asylum Support Service. The support rate has risen from £33.50 to £37.00 per week.

Animal Procedures Committee

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Office (Mr. Bob Ainsworth): In accordance with Section 20(5) of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986, I have placed the Committee's annual report for 2001 in the Library today. Annexes to the report include the Committee's reports on Biotechnology and Openness.

TRANSPORT

Bus Fuel Duty Rebate (Biodiesel)

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State (Mr. David Jamieson): A 100 per cent. rebate is now available for the fuel duty paid on biodiesel used by bus services which are eligible for support under the rules of my Depatment's Bus Services Operators Grant scheme.

CABINET OFFICE

Workforce Development

The Minister of State (Mr. Douglas Alexander): The Strategy Unit's report "In Demand, Adult Skills in the 21st Century—part 2" has today been published as a report of the Government.

The report, commissioned by the Prime Minister, sets out a detailed and long-term plan for improving the productivity of the UK through raising skills levels in the workforce.

It focuses on the government's strategy for

Raising demand from employers and individuals, providing access to good quality information and advice and supporting those who find it the most difficult to access development to meet their needs, particularly small businesses and individuals with lower skill levels.

Improving the quality and responsiveness of training to make sure it meets the needs of employers and individuals.

Providing a government framework of qualifications and accountabilities that supports development to support higher productivity and keep pace with industrial change.

The report also sets out who is responsible for delivering the improvements, how progress will be monitored and how success will be evaluated.

Copies of the report have been placed in the libraries of the House. Additional copies and further information can also be found on the Cabinet Office website at www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/innovation.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Local Radio Services

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Tessa Jowell): After public consultation on the proposed radio ownership scheme, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and I have agreed that the policy of local radio ownership should ensure that in every local market with a reasonable range of services (three or more analogue stations) there should be at least two commercial radio operators and at least three commercial media voices across local and regional radio, television and newspapers.

For radio-only operators, maximum ownership will be limited to 55 per cent. of a market, as defined by a points system. For significant cross-media owners (either the relevant regional Channel 3 licensee or a local newspaper owner with more than 50 per cent. in the market in the coverage area of a radio station) there will be a stricter limit of 45 per cent. for analogue service, although this will only be applied in areas where there are three or more overlapping licences. No one will be allowed to own a local radio licence if they own both the relevant regional Channel 3 licence and more than 50 per cent. of the local newspaper market in the coverage are of the radio station.

The necessary rules would be introduced by order once the Communications Bill is enacted and a draft order would then be published alongside the Bill.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Local Authority Housing Assets

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State (Mr. Tony McNulty): The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is about to go out to consultation on a proposal to amend the Local Authority (Capital Finance) Regulations 1997 to allow local authorities to use up to 100 per cent. of the capital receipt they receive from the disposal of certain housing assets, excluding right to buy sales and large and small scale voluntary transfers, for the provision of affordable housing.

The consultation paper and draft regulations may be found on Office of the Deputy Prime Minister's web-site at http://www.odpm.gov.uk. Copies of the consultation paper have also been placed in both house libraries.

Written Ministerial Statements

Friday 15 November 2002

HOME DEPARTMENT

French Frontier and Customs Officers

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. David Blunkett): The Protocol to the Treaty of Canterbury concerning frontier controls which came into force in 1993 allows for French Frontier and Customs Officers to carry their sidearms as an integral part of their national uniform while operating juxtaposed controls in the United Kingdom. The precise conditions which will govern this will be set out formally in a treaty with the French Government towards which we are working. In the meantime, authorities for French officers to carry their firearms while operating juxtaposed controls have been issued by the Home Office. These authorities will be subject to jointly accepted arrangements concerning security and safety set out in the draft treaty. I have placed a copy of the draft treaty in the Library.

Written Ministerial Statements

Monday 18 November 2002

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

HRA Subsidy System

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. Tony McNulty): Following consideration of proposals made in a consultation paper issued in July 2001, the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) subsidy system was changed from 2002–2003 to support the policy of social rent reform announced in the December 2000 housing policy statement—Quality and Choice: A Decent Home for All.

We consulted local authorities and others in summer 2002 on further proposals to adjust the HRA subsidy system to take account of aspects of the new policy that it was not possible to address in 2002–2003. We also consulted on proposals about the treatment of service charges within the HRA subsidy system. There was general support for our objectives, and the HRA subsidy system for 2003–2004 will be adjusted as necessary to reflect the consultation proposals.

For 2003–2004, we will increase the resources per dwelling available at the national level for management allowances by about 8.1 per cent and for maintenance by about 5.7 per cent in cash terms, of which about 2.2 per cent will be to correct for technical changes to the subsidy system. This is an increase on the amounts proposed in the previous Spending Review, and will provide authorities with an extra £63 per dwelling compared with 2002–03.

The Government is committed to fighting antisocial behaviour. Local Authorities, as social landlords, are essential in winning this battle. We will encourage local authorities to use this real terms cash increase to tackle this blight, through imaginative prevention, enforcement and rehabilitation initiatives.

The Major Repairs Allowance will increase by about 2.5 per cent per dwelling in cash terms at the national level. For subsidy purposes, we are assuming that all local authority rents will be subject to two changes for 2003–2004. First an increase by about 3.5 per cent from their levels in 2002–2003. Secondly an adjustment, which for some authorities will increase and for others reduce rents, to move rents a second step towards the formula set out in our policy for rent restructuring. We have assumed that all authorities made a first step towards the formula rent in 2002–2003.

We have today issued for consultation the drafts of the HRA subsidy and Item 8 determinations for 2003–2004, as well as the draft general determination of administration of HRA subsidy 2002, which translate these national figures into subsidy allocations for individual housing authorities. Copies of the draft determinations and supporting material are being placed in the Library of the House, and will be available on my Office's web site. These allocations are based on the most up-to-date information available to us from authorities, and may change as that information is refined. Authorities have until 12 December to comment on the draft determinations.

Regional Planning Guidance for the North East

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (Mr. Tony McNulty): "Regional Planning Guidance for the North East (RPG1) is being published today.

RPG1 sets out the spatial development strategy that encompasses proposals for the development of the region's economy, housing, transport infrastructure, and other land uses. The priority of the strategy is to direct the majority of new development to the built up areas of the Tyne, Wear and Tees conurbations, and adopt a sequential approach to identifying sites for development to ensure that development is located in the most sustainable locations. RPG1 also sets out proposals for the conservation, management and enhancement of the region's natural and cultural environment.

I am pleased that much of the vision, objectives and core strategy of RPG1 carries forward to a great extent what was proposed in the original draft RPG prepared by the Association of North East Councils (ANEC). RPG1 reflects the effective working that was achieved between ANEC, local authorities, the Regional Development Agency, One NorthEast, and other stakeholders, all of whom have made valuable contributions to refine and enhance the original draft guidance. It builds on the inclusive process for preparing RPG that the Government has put in place. Many of the comments received in response to the consultations carried out earlier have made a positive contribution to the overall strategy for sustainable development and have been taken on board.

The North East Assembly, which now has the role of Regional Planning Body, will work with partners to ensure its effective implementation, monitoring and review."

HOME DEPARTMENT

Police and Criminal Evidence Act

The Minister of State, (Home Department (Mr. John Denham): In May, my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary commissioned a fundamental review of the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 (PACE) and the accompanying Codes of Practice to be conducted jointly by the Home Office and the Cabinet Office.

The review focused on the basic requirements of PACE and the Codes that underlie police procedures with particular emphasis on, but not limited to, those aspects that govern detention and the custody process. In particular, the review team was asked to consider whether the Act and the Codes were still the best way of ensuring that the powers of the police are properly exercised and the rights of suspects are adequately protected.

The review team has now reported and I have today placed a copy of their report in the Library. The main conclusion of the review is that the basic PACE approach is sound and still strikes broadly the right balance between the powers of the police and the rights and freedoms of the public. In particular, the review found that the general view of PACE is positive, especially in terms of the way it is viewed as having standardised and professionalised police work. The police have a clear framework within which to operate, whilst the provisions of the Act protect the individual.

However, the review also found that there are aspects of PACE that require updating to reflect changes in society over the years since the legislation was brought into force. Taken together, the review has proposed a challenging programme of change to amend the PACE legislation and the Codes of Practice which the Government has accepted and will take forward as part of its ongoing police reform agenda. This is a vital opportunity to improve the way the police operate and taken together with the measures we have already introduced in the Police Reform Act 2002, will bring about a real difference to the everyday lives of police officers on the front line and consequently to the delivery of services.

DEFENCE

War Pensions and Allowances

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Dr. Lewis Moonie): New rates of war pensions and allowances proposed from April 2003.

The annual uprating of war pensions and allowances for 2003 will take place from the week beginning 7 April 2003.

War Pensions Rates

Disablement Pension (100% rates unless otherwise shown) (Weekly rates unless otherwise shown)	*Rates 2002* £	*Rates 2003* £
officer (per annum)	6,356.00	6,465.00
other ranks	121.80	123.90
Age allowances		
40%–50%	8.15	8.30
over 50% but not over 70%	12.55	12.75
over 70% but not over 90%	17.85	18.15
over 90%	25.10	25.50
Disablement gratuity		
specified minor injury (min.)	775.00	788.00
specified minor injury (max.)	5,792.00	5,890.00
unspecified minor injury (min.)	321.00	326.00
unspecified minor injury (max.)	7,532.00	7,660.00
Unemployability allowance		
personal	75.25	76.55
adult dependency increase	42.45	43.15
increase for first child	9.85	10.00
increase for subsequent children	11.55	11.75
Invalidity Allowance		
higher rate	14.90	15.15
middle rate	9.50	9.70
lower rate	4.75	4.85
Constant attendance allowance		
exceptional rate	92.00	93.60
intermediate rate	69.00	70.20
full day rate	46.00	46.80
part day rate	23.00	23.40
Comforts allowance		
higher rate	19.70	20.00
lower rate	9.85	10.00
Mobility supplement	43.85	44.60
Allowance for lowered standard of occupation (max)	45.92	46.72
Exceptionally severe disablement allowance	46.00	46.80
Severe disablement occupational allowance	23.00	23.40
Clothing allowance (per annum)	157.00	160.00
Educational allowance (per annum) (max)	120.00	120.00
War widow's pension		
Widow(er) (private)	92.00	93.85
Widow(er) (NCO)	92.30	93.85
Widow(er)—officer (p.a.max)	5,689.00	5,786.00
Childless widow(er) u-40 (other ranks)	22.12	22.50
Childless widow(er)-u-40 officer (p.a. max)	5,689.00	5,786.00
Supplementary Pension	59.95	60.97
Age Allowance		
(a) age 65 to 69	10.55	10.75
(b) age 70 to 79	20.20	20.55
(c) age 80 and over	30.05	30.55
Children's allowance		
increase for first child	14.55	14.80
increase for subsequent children	16.20	16.50
Orphan's pension		
increase for first child	16.50	16.80
increase for subsequent children	18.15	18.45
Unmarried dependant living as spouse (max)	89.95	91.50
Rent allowance (maximum)	34.80	35.40
Adult Orphan's pension (maximum)	70.95	72.15

Written Ministerial Statements

Tuesday 19 November 2002

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Council Duties

The Deputy Prime Minister and First Secretary of State (Mr. John Prescott): We want to encourage people to stand as local councillors. We recognise their voluntary contribution as an important aspect of public life. We recognise that this commitment can be time-consuming, and therefore welcome employers encouraging their employees to serve as councillors by allowing them paid time-off to carry out their council duties.

The Electoral Commission has published its view that, under Schedule 7 to the Political Parties Elections and Referendums Act 2000 ("the Act"), the provision of such paid time-off should be treated as a political donation to the employee in his or her capacity as a holder of elective office. On the basis of this view, the value of such paid time-off must be reported to the Commission, where the total is more than £1,000 for each employee in the course of a year. In addition, employees will not lawfully be able to accept such paid time-off from their employers where these are not "permissible donors" under the Act.

The Government accepts that there has been uncertainty surrounding the issue. However, the Government's long-standing policy is that the provisions of the Act should not apply to the receipt by a councillor of paid time-off for carrying out his or her duty as a councillor. It would be clearly wrong for some employers not to be able to offer paid time-off to their employees to serve as councillors. Moreover requirements on other employers, and in some cases their employees, to calculate and to report the value of such paid time-off to the Electoral Commission would be a disincentive for employers from supporting employees who wish to serve as councillors.

Consequently, we are proposing to include in the Local Government Bill, announced on 13 November in the Queen's Speech, amendments to Schedule 7 to the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000. The effect of these amendments would be to exclude the value of any salary paid to an employee by an employer in respect of time-off taken in order to undertake duties as a local councillor from the definition of a donation in Schedule 7 to the Act. This would mean that it will be open to all employers to grant such paid time-off, and that the value of such time-off would not have to be reported to the Electoral Commission.

We are providing for these amendments to apply with retrospective effect, so that any paid time-off which might have been granted to councillors since 16 February 2001, when the requirements of Schedule 7 to Act came into force, is not to be considered as a political donation.

Empty Homes

The Minister for Local Government and the Regions (Mr. Nick Raynsford): The Government recognises that council tax information may be useful to local authority empty homes services in their work to get such property back into use. However, it is unclear whether legislation as it currently stands allows either personal or non-personal information collected for council tax purposes to be divulged to, or used by, other parts of an authority and we are aware that the Information Commissioner has advised that the legislation does not permit such uses of council tax personal information.

The Government has therefore decided to legislate in the forthcoming Local Government Bill to make it clear local authorities can use personal and non-personal council tax information to support the development and implementation of strategies dealing with empty homes. In legislating, we will ensure that personal information will be limited to an individual's name or an address or number for communicating with him. I believe this is a sensible and proportionate response which will help get more long term empty domestic property back into use.

Council Tax

The Minister for Local Government and the Regions (Mr. Nick Raynsford): In the light of responses to last November's consultation paper on proposed changes for second homes and long term empty homes, we have decided to give local authorities new discretion in relation to council tax discounts and exemptions.

Firstly, we will allow English local authorities to reduce council tax discounts on second homes from 50 per cent to a minimum 10 per cent. Authorities in the areas where the discount has been reduced will retain any additional council tax raised. We do not propose to reduce their revenue support grant to reflect their ability to raise more council tax. The changes could raise an estimated extra £65 million in England and authorities will be able to decide how to spend this money to improve local public services, such as affordable housing, transport or policing.

We have decided not to remove the discount completely because owners need an incentive to inform the local authority that properties are second homes. Without such information, local authorities would not be able to identify the extra revenue which could be raised from changing the discount.

We recognise the special position of those who are required to live in tied accommodation provided by their employer or because of a legal requirement, such as a condition of a licence. A discount of 50 per cent will continue to apply in these cases.

Secondly, we will allow English local authorities to reduce or remove completely the current 50 per cent council tax discounts on long term empty dwellings. Authorities will not retain any additional revenue raised. This is because we believe that decisions on whether to end the discount should be based purely on whether the measure is likely to make owners consider bringing their properties back into use.

Thirdly, we will give local authorities in England and Wales powers to create their own discounts and exemptions, including powers to grant relief on a case by case basis. Authorities exercising these powers will meet the costs of any new discounts or exemptions.

These decisions follow consultation on the proposals which demonstrated strong support for the reduction of discounts on second and long-term empty homes.

An analysis of the responses to the consultation exercise has already been placed in the Library of the House and on the web-site of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

These measures require primary legislation. As we said in the consultation draft of our Local Government Bill published on 12 June, we plan to add these measures to this Bill before it is introduced.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

"Success for All" Strategy

The Minister of State for Education and Skills (Mr. Charles Clarke): We will today launch the "Success for All" strategy for reforming further education and training. "Success for All" will build on the strengths and systematically tackle the weaknesses within the learning and skills sector, through a programme of reforms which will:

improve the responsiveness, design and quality of provision in each locality to meet learner, employer and community needs, with providers focusing on their individual strengths;

achieve excellence in teaching and learning across the sector by identifying, creating and disseminating good, learning materials and training and support practice programmes;

improve leadership, raise the number of qualified teachers, managers and support staff in the sector, and ensure better rewards for high performing staff; and

Establish a new planning, funding and accountability system for providers in the sector.

This strategy represents a vote of confidence for the learning and skills sector, and will be supported by our largest ever investment programme in further education and training:

the total planned funding for further education allocated to the Learning and Skills Council will rise by £1.2 billion by 2005–6 compared to 2002–3, a 19 per cent. real terms increase in 3 years;

all learning and skills providers will negotiate 3-year funding deals based on agreed assumptions on participation levels;

capital funding for the whole learning and skills sector allocated to the LSC will rise by over 60 per cent. in real terms by 2005–6 compared to 2002–3; and

funding of over £40million in 2003–4 rising to over £100 million in the year 2005–6, to deliver a major programme of training and support for teachers and trainers across the learning and skills sector in response to area reviews and inspection findings.

For further education and sixth form colleges, we will provide new money sufficient to raise the core unit of funding by 2 per cent. each year in real terms, on average. Targeted funds for college pay and staff training will also be consolidated into core funding, further boosting the core unit of funding by at least 3.5 per cent. from 2003–4.

Higher funding rates will be paid to colleges who perform well in meeting the needs of learners and employers. Poor performing colleges will get lower increases. Where necessary they will receive additional support and intervention until they improve. By 2005–6, this investment should enable a substantial narrowing of the core funding gap between FE and school sixth forms, and of the pay gap for staff between general FE colleges and schools.

We are also committed to further investment in work based learning providers to deliver the major reform of Modern Apprenticeships recommended by the MA Advisory Committee under Sir John Cassels, and the PSA target of 28 per cent. of young people entering MAs before they are 22 by 2004. We will make further announcements in due course about assumed funding for work based learning and adult and community learning.

DEFENCE

Medical Manning and Retention

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Dr. Lewis Moonie): The Medical Manning and Retention Review has recently been completed. It was conducted inclusively, with the involvement of the British Medical and Dental Associations and NHS representation. The Review was undertaken against the background of serious manning shortfalls among medical and dental officers in the Defence Medical Services (DMS). It complements the work of the Medical Quinquennial Review (MQR) and its recommendations will be taken forward in parallel with those of the MQR. The Review will inform the Ministry of Defence paper of evidence to the Armed Forces Pay Review Body (AFPRB) for the 2003 pay round.

The Review has involved a detailed examination of the manning requirement and how this should be met. It has also examined the factors which influence medical and dental officer manning and, to assist in this, an independent human resources consultant was employed to obtain the views of serving medical and dental officers and those who had recently left the Armed Forces. As part of the Review, comparisons were made with pay and conditions of service in the NHS and other potential areas of employment. The MOD's existing proposals for aligning the terms of service of medical and dental officers across the three Services were also re-examined.

The Review concluded that three main issues needed to be addressed if the necessary improvements in recruitment and retention were to be achieved: overstretch; pay and pensions; and the quality of life. It made a number of recommendations covering both remuneration and non-financial issues. The main recommendations are:

New pay arrangements, endorsed by the AFPRB, which will form the basis for our evidence on medical and dental officers' pay to the AFPRB early in the New Year. It is planned that the new pay structure will be implemented in two phases; the first, which contains most of the changes, with effect from 1 April 2003, and the second with effect from 1 April 2004;

Interim improvements to the pension arrangements for DMS medical and dental officers in advance of the introduction of a final salary scheme for all military personnel around 2005–6;

Introduction of "Golden hellos" not exceeding £50,000 gross for a commensurate 5-year return of service to improve direct entry recruiting in those medical specialities that are in short supply and have a significant deployment base.

The Review also addressed the need further to strengthen management processes across the DMS and proposed a range of recommendations encompassing management, career and quality of life issues which will receive urgent action.

The outcome of the Review will provide a significant opportunity to build on the work of the MQR and maintain focus on the two key defence medical outputs—deployable operational medical capability, and timely appropriate healthcare for Service personnel. The Government is committed to providing modern and forward-looking Defence Medical Services fit to meet the challenges we expect to face in the twenty-first century.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Benefits Uprating

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mr. Andrew Smith): The new rates of benefits proposed from April 2003 are set out in the tables. The Annual uprating of benefits will take place in the first full week of the tax year. In 2003, this will be the week beginning 7 April. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland proposes to introduce similar changes for Northern Ireland.

Weekly rates unless otherwise shown

	Rates	
	2002	*2003*
Attendance Allowance		
higher rate	56.25	57.20
lower rate	37.65	38.30
Child Benefit		
— only, elder or eldest for whom child benefit is payable (couple)	15.75	16.05
— only, elder or eldest for whom child benefit is payable (lone parent)	17.55	17.55
— each subsequent child	10.55	10.75
Council Tax Benefit		
Personal allowances		
single		
18 to 24	42.70	43.25
25 or over	53.95	54.65
lone parent—18 or over	53.95	54.65
couple—one or both over 18	84.65	85.75
Dependent Children		
from birth to September following 16th birthday	37.00	38.50
from September following 16th birthday to day before 19th birthday	37.80	38.50
Pensioner (from October 2003)		
single—60 to 64		102.10
couple—one or both 60 to 64		155.80
single—65 and over		116.90
couple—one or both 65 and over		175.00
Premiums		
family	14.75	15.75
family (lone parent rate)	22.20	22.20
pensioner		
single	44.20	47.45
couple	65.15	70.05
pensioner (enhanced)		
single	44.20	47.45
couple	65.15	70.05
pensioner (higher)		
single	44.20	47.45
couple	65.15	70.05
disability		
single	23.00	23.30
couple	32.80	33.25
enhanced disability premium single rate	11.25	11.40
disabled child rate	11.25	16.60
couple rate	16.25	16.45
severe disability		
single	42.25	42.95
couple (one qualifies)	42.25	42.95
couple (both qualify)	84.50	85.90
disabled child	35.50	41.30
carer	24.80	25.10
bereavement	21.55	22.80
Allowance for personal expenses for claimants in hospital		
higher rate	18.90	19.35
lower rate	15.10	15.50

Weekly rates unless otherwise shown

	Rates	
	2002	*2003*
Non-dependent deductions		
aged 18 or over and in remunerative work		
— gross income: £293 or more	6.95	6.95
— gross income: £235 to £292.99	5.80	5.80
— gross income: £137 to £234.99	4.60	4.60
— gross income less than £137	2.30	2.30
others, aged 18 or over	2.30	2.30
Alternative maximum Council Tax Benefit		
second adult on IS or JSA(ib)	25% of Council Tax	25% of Council Tax
second adult's gross income:		
— under £137	15% of Council Tax	15% of Council Tax
— £137 to £176.99	7.5% of Council Tax	7.5% of Council Tax
Capital		
upper limit	16,000.00	16,000.00
amount disregarded	3,000.00	3,000.00
upper limit (clmt/ptner 60 or over)	16,000.00	16,000.00
upper limit (PC guarantee) from October 2003		No limit
amount disregarded (clmt/ptner 60 or over)	6,000.00	6,000.00
child disregard	3,000.00	3,000.00
upper limit of RC/NH	16,000.00	16,000.00
amt disregarded of RC/NH	10,000.00	10,000.00
Tariff income		
£1 for every complete £250 or part thereof between amount of capital disregarded and capital upper limit		
Tariff income (clmt/ptner 60 or over) from October 2003		
£1 for every £500 or part thereof between amount of capital disregard and capital upper limit		
Earnings disregards		
where disability premium awarded	20.00	20.00
various specified employments	20.00	20.00
lone parent	25.00	25.00
where the claimant has a partner	10.00	10.00
single claimant	5.00	5.00
where carer premium awarded	20.00	20.00
childcare charges	94.50	94.50
childcare charges (2 or more children)	140.00	140.00
Other income disregards		
maintenance disregard	15.00	15.00
war disablement pension and war widow's pension	10.00	10.00
certain voluntary and charitable payments	20.00	20.00
student loan	10.00	10.00
student's covenanted income	5.00	5.00
income from boarders:		
disregard the fixed amount (£20) plus		
50% of the balance of the charge	20.00	20.00
30 Hr Adult Allowance in WTC	11.65	11.90
30 Hr Adult Credit in WTC	11.65	11.90
Expenses for subtenants		
furnished or unfurnished	4.00	4.00
where heating is included, additional	9.40	9.65
Dependency Increases		
Adult Dependency Increases for spouse or person looking after children, with;		
retirement pension or own insurance	45.20	46.35
long-term incap. benefit, unemployability supplement	42.45	43.15
severe disablement allowance	25.45	25.90
invalid care allowance (carer's allowance from April 2003)	25.35	25.80
short-term incap. benefit if beneficiary over pension age	40.80	41.50
maternity allowance/short-term incap. benefit	33.10	33.65
Child Dependency Increases with; retirement pension, widowed mothers allowance, widowed parents allowance, short-term incap. benefit at the higher rate and long-term incap. benefit invalid care allowance (carer's allowance from April 2003)		
severe disab. allowance, higher rate industrial death benefit, unemployability supplement and short-term incap. benefit if beneficiary over pension age	11.35	11.35
NB—The Overlapping Benefits Regulations provide for the rate of child dependency increases to be adjusted where the increase is payable for the eldest eligible child for whom ChB is also payable. The weekly rate of the increase is reduced by the differential (less £3.50 from April 2000), between the rate of ChB payable for the oldest eligible child and that payable for a subsequent child		

Weekly rates unless otherwise shown

	Rates	
	2002	*2003*
Disability Living Allowance		
Care Component		
highest	56.25	57.20
middle	37.65	38.30
lowest	14.90	15.15
Mobility Component		
higher	39.30	39.95
lower	14.90	15.15
Earnings Rules		
Invalid Care Allowance (Carer's Allowance from April 2003)	75.00	77.00
Limit of earnings from councillor's allowance (new rate applies from October 2002)	66.00	67.50
Permitted work earnings limit (new rate applies from October 2002)	66.00	67.50
Industrial injuries unemployability supplement permitted earnings level (annual amount)	3,432.00	3,510.00
Adult dependency increases with short-term incap. benefit where claimant is		
(a) under pension age	33.10	33.65
(b) over pension age	40.80	41.50
maternity allowance	33.10	33.65
retirement pension, long-term incapacity benefit, severe disablement allowance,unemployability supplement where dependant		
(a) is living with claimant	53.95	54.65
(b) still qualifies for the tapered earnings rule	45.09	45.09
retirement pension, long term incap. benefit	45.20	46.35
and unemployability supplement where dependant not living with claimant	42.45	43.15
severe disablement allowance where dependent not living with claimant	25.45	25.90
invalid care allowance (carer's allowance from April 2003)	25.35	25.80
Child dependency increases level at which CDIs are affected by earnings of claimant's spouse or partner		
for first child	155.00	160.00
for each subsequent child	20.00	20.00
Guardian's Allowance	11.35	11.55
Housing Benefit		
Personal allowances		
single		
16 to 24	42.70	43.25
25 or over	53.95	54.65
lone parent		
under 18	42.70	43.25
18 or over	53.95	54.65
couple		
both under 18	64.45	65.30
one or both 18 or over	84.65	85.75
dependent children		
from birth to September following 16th birthday	37.00	38.50
from September following 16th birthday to day before 19th birthday	37.80	38.50
pensioner (from October 2003)		
single—60 to 64		102.10
couple—one or both 60 to 64		155.80
single—65 and over		116.90
couple—one or both 64 or over		175.00
Premiums		
family	14.75	15.75
family (lone parent rate)	22.20	22.20
pensioner	44.20	47.45
single	44.20	47.45
couple	65.15	70.05
pensioner (enhanced)		
single	44.20	47.45
couple	65.15	70.05
pensioner (higher)		
single	44.20	47.45
couple	65.15	70.05
disability		
single	23.00	23.30
couple	32.80	33.25
enhanced [illegible]bility premium single rate	11.25	11.40
disabled child rate	11.25	16.60
couple rate	16.25	16.45

Weekly rates unless otherwise shown

	Rates	
	2002	*2003*
severe disability		
single	42.25	42.95
couple (one qualifies)	42.25	42.95
couple (both qualify)	84.50	85.90
disabled child	35.50	41.30
carer	24.80	25.10
bereavement	21.55	22.80
Allowance for personal expenses for claimants in hospital		
higher rate	18.90	19.35
lower rate	15.10	15.50
Non-dependent deductions, rent rebates and allowances		
aged 25 and over, in receipt of Income Support or income-based Job Seekers Allowance age 18 or over, not in remunerative work or		
— gross income less than £92	7.40	7.40
age 18 or over and in remunerative work		
— gross income: less than £92	7.40	7.40
— gross income: £92 to £136.99	17.00	17.00
— gross income: £137 to £176.99	23.35	23.35
— gross income: £177 to £234.99	38.20	38.20
— gross income: £235 to £292.99	43.50	43.50
— gross income: £293 and above	47.75	47.75
Service charges for fuel		
heating	9.40	9.65
hot water	1.15	1.20
lighting	0.80	0.80
cooking	1.15	1.20
Amount ineligible for meals		
three or more meals a day		
single claimant	19.25	19.50
each person in family aged 16 or over	19.25	19.50
each child under 16	9.70	9.85
less than three meals a day		
single claimant	12.80	12.95
each person in family aged 16 or over	12.80	12.95
each child under 16	6.45	6.55
breakfast only—claimant and each member of family	2.35	2.40
Capital		
upper limit	16,000.00	16,000.00
amount disregarded	3,000.00	3,000.00
upper limit (clmt/ptner 60 or over)	16,000.00	16,000.00
upper limit (PC guarantee) from October 2003		No limit
amount disregarded (clmt/ptner 60 or over)	6,000.00	6,000.00
child disregard	3,000.00	3,000.00
upper limit of RC/NH	16,000.00	16,000.00
amount disregarded of RC/NH	10,000.00	10,000.00
Tariff income		
for every complete £250 or part thereof between amount of capital disregarded and capital upper limit		
Tariff income (clmt/ptner 60 or over) from October 2003		
£1 for every £500 or part thereof betwen amount of capital disregard and capital upper limit		
Earnings disregards		
where disability premium awarded	20.00	20.00
various specified employments	20.00	20.00
lone parent	25.00	25.00
where the claimant has a partner	10.00	10.00
single claimant	5.00	5.00
where carer premium awarded	20.00	20.00
childcare charges	94.50	94.50
childcare charges (2 or more children)	140.00	140.00
Other income disregards		
maintenance disregard	15.00	15.00
war disablement pension and war widow's pension	10.00	10.00
certain voluntary and charitable payments	20.00	20.00
student loan	10.00	10.00
student's covenanted income	5.00	5.00
income from boarders:		
disregard the fixed amount (£20) plus		
50% of the balance of the charge	20.00	20.00
30 Hr Adult Allowance in WTC	11.65	11.90
30 Hr Adult Credit in WTC	11.65	11.90

Weekly rates unless otherwise shown

	Rates	
	2002	*2003*
Expenses for subtenants		
furnished or unfurnished	4.00	4.00
where heating is included, additional	9.40	9.65
Maximum rates for recovery of overpayments		
ordinary overpayments	8.10	8.25
where claimant convicted of fraud	10.80	10.80
Incapacity Benefit		
Long-term Incapacity Benefit	70.95	72.15
Short-term Incapacity Benefit (under pension age)		
lower rate	53.50	54.40
higher rate	63.25	64.35
Short-term Incapacity Benefit (over pension age)		
lower rate	68.05	69.20
higher rate	70.95	72.15
Increase of Long-term Incap. Benefit for age		
higher rate	14.90	15.15
lower rate	7.45	7.60
Invalidity Allowance (Transitional)		
higher rate	14.90	15.15
middle rate	9.50	9.70
lower rate	4.75	4.85
Income Support		
Personal Allowances		
single		
under 18—usual rate	32.50	32.90
under 18—higher rate payable in specific circumstances	42.70	43.25
18 to 24	42.70	43.25
25 or over	53.95	54.65
lone parent		
under 18—usual rate	32.50	32.90
under 18—higher rate payable in specific circumstances	42.70	43.25
18 or over	53.95	54.65
couple		
both under 18	32.50	32.90
both under 18, one disabled	42.70	43.25
both under 18, with resp. for a child	64.45	65.30
one under 18, one 18 to 24	42.70	43.25
one under 18, one 25+	53.95	54.65
both 18 or over	84.65	85.75
dependent children		
birth to September following 16th birthday	37.00	38.50
from September following 16th birthday to day before 19th birthday	37.80	38.50
Residental Allowance		
except Greater London	64.40	65.50
Greater London	71.65	72.85
Premiums		
family	14.75	15.75
family (lone parent rate)	15.90	15.90
pensioner		
single	44.20	47.45
couple	65.15	70.05
pensioner (enhanced)		
single	44.20	47.45
couple	65.15	70.05
pensioner (higher)		
single	44.20	47.45
couple	65.15	70.05
disability		
single	23.00	23.00
couple	32.80	33.25
enhanced disability premium single rate	11.25	11.40
disabled child rate	11.25	16.60
couple rate	16.25	16.45
severe disability		
single	42.25	42.95
couple (one qualifies)	42.25	42.95
couple (both qualify)	84.50	85.90
disabled child	35.50	41.30
carer	24.80	25.10
bereavement	21.55	22.80

Weekly rates unless otherwise shown

	Rates	
	2002	*2003*
hospital		
higher rate	18.90	19.35
lower rate	15.10	15.50
local authority (Pt III) accommodation	75.50	77.45
of which, Personal Expenses	16.80	17.50
Allowances for personal expenses for claimants in:		
the Polish Home, Ilford Park max amount for accommodation and meals	385.00	390.00
personal expenses for claimant	17.35	17.50
personal expenses for partner	17.35	17.50
personal expenses for dep children		
(a) under 11	6.35	6.45
(b) 11 to 15	9.30	9.40
(c) 16 to 17	10.75	10.90
(d) 18	15.55	15.55
personal expenses allowance for claimant admitted or readmitted on or after 1 April 1995	16.80	17.50
Housing costs		
deduction for non-dependents aged 25 and over, in receipt of Income Support or income based Job Seekers Allowance aged 18 or over, not in work or		
— gross income less than £92	7.40	7.40
aged 18 or over and in remunerative work:		
— gross income: less than £92	7.40	7.40
— gross income: £92 to £136.99	17.00	17.00
— gross income: £137 to £176.99	23.35	23.35
— gross income: £177 to £234.99	38.20	38.20
— gross income: £235 to £292.99	43.50	43.50
— gross income: £293 and above	47.75	47.75
Deduction for direct payments arrears of housing, fuel and water costs, council tax and fines default, and	2.70	2.75
deductions for child maintenance (standard)	5.40	5.50
deductions for child maintenance (lower)	2.70	2.75
Arrears of Community Charge		
court order against claimant	2.70	2.75
court order against couple	4.25	4.30
Maximum rates for recovery of overpayments		
ordinary overpayments	8.10	8.25
where claimant convicted of fraud	10.80	10.80
Reduction in benefit for strikers	29.00	29.50
Capital		
upper limit	8,000.00	8,000.00
amount disregard	3,000.00	3,000.00
upper limited (clmt/ptner 60 or over)	12,000.00	12,000.00
amount disregarded (clmt/ptner 60 or over)	6,000.00	6,000.00
child's limit	3,000.00	3,000.00
upper limit of RC/NH	16,000.00	16,000.00
amount disregarded of RC/NH	10,000.00	10,000.00
Tariff income		
£1 for every complete £250 or part thereof between amount of capital disregarded and capital upper limit		
Disregards		
standard earnings	5.00	5.00
couples earnings	10.00	10.00
higher earnings	20.00	20.00
war disablement pension and war widow's pension	10.00	10.00
voluntary and charitable payments	20.00	20.00
student loan	10.00	10.00
student's covenanted income	5.00	5.00
income from boarders:		
disregard the fixed amount (£20) plus 50% of the balance of the charge	20.00	20.00
Expenses for subtenants		
furnished or unfurnished	4.00	4.00
where heating is included, additional	9.40	9.65
Industrial Death Benefit		
Widow's pension		
higher rate	75.50	77.45
lower rate	22.65	23.24
Widower's pension	75.50	77.45
Industrial Injuries Disablement Pension		
18 and over, or under 18 with dependents		
100%	114.80	116.80
90%	103.32	105.12

Weekly rates unless otherwise shown

	Rates	
	2002	*2003*
80%	91.84	93.44
70%	80.36	81.76
60%	68.88	70.08
50%	57.40	58.40
40%	45.92	46.72
30%	34.44	35.04
20%	22.96	23.36
Under 18		
100%	70.35	71.55
90%	63.32	64.40
80%	56.28	57.24
70%	49.25	50.09
60%	42.21	42.93
60%	42.21	42.93
50%	35.18	35.78
40%	28.14	28.62
30%	21.11	21.47
20%	14.07	14.31
Maximum life gratuity (lump sum)	7,630.00	7,760.00
Unemployability Supplement	70.95	72.15
plus where appropriate an increase for early incapacity		
higher rate	14.90	15.15
middle rate	9.50	9.70
lower rate	4.75	4.85
Maximum reduced earnings allowance	45.92	46.72
Maximum retirement allowance	11.84	11.68
Constant attendance allowance		
exceptional rate	92.00	93.60
intermediate rate	69.00	70.20
normal maximum rate	46.00	46.80
part-time rate	23.00	23.40
Exceptionally severe disablement allowance	46.00	46.80
Invalid Care Allowance (Carer's Allowance from April 2003)	42.45	43.15
Jobseekers Allowance		
Contribution based JSA—Pers. rates		
under 18	32.50	32.90
18 to 24	42.70	43.25
25 or over	53.95	54.65
Income-based JSA—Pers. allowances		
Under 18	32.50	32.90
18 to 24	42.70	43.25
25 or over	53.95	54.65
lone parent		
under 18—usual rate	32.50	32.90
under 18—higher rate payable in specific circumstances	42.70	43.25
18 or over	53.95	54.65
couple both under 18	32.50	32.90
both under 18, one disabled	42.70	43.25
both under 18, with responsibility for a child	64.45	65.30
one under 18, one 18 to 24	42.70	43.25
one under 18, one 25+	53.95	54.65
both 18 or over	84.65	85.75
dependent children from birth to September following 16th birthday	37.00	38.50
from September following 16th birthday to day before 19th birthday	37.80	38.50
Residential Allowance except Greater London	64.40	65.50
Greater London	71.65	72.85

Weekly rates unless otherwise shown

	Rates 2002	2003
Premiums		
family	14.75	15.75
family (lone parent rate)	15.90	15.90
pensioner		
single	44.20	47.45
couple	65.15	70.05
pensioner (enhanced)		
single	44.20	47.45
couple	65.15	70.05
pensioner (higher)		
single	44.20	47.45
couple	65.15	70.05
disability		
single	23.00	23.30
couple	32.80	33.25
enhanced disability premium single rate	11.25	11.40
disability child rate	11.25	16.60
couple rate	16.25	16.45
severe disability		
single	42.25	42.95
couple (one qualifies)	42.25	42.95
couple (both qualify)	84.50	85.90
disabled child	35.50	41.30
carer	24.80	25.10
bereavement	21.55	22.80
hospital		
higher rate	18.90	19.35
lower rate	15.10	15.50
local authority (Pt III)	75.50	77.45
accommodation of which, Personal Expenses	16.80	17.50
Housing costs deduction for non-dependents aged 25 and over, in receipt of Income Support or income based Job Seekers Allowance aged 18 or over, not in remunerative work or:		
—gross income less than £92 aged 18 or over and in remunerative work	7.40	7.40
—gross income: less than £92	7.40	7.40
—gross income: £92 to £136.99	17.00	17.00
—gross income: £137 to £176.99	23.35	23.35
—gross income: £177 to £234.99	38.20	38.20
—gross income: £235 to £292.99	43.50	43.50
—gross income: £293 and above	47.75	47.75
Deductions for direct payments		
Deductions from JSA (IB) arrears of housing, fuel and water costs, council tax and fines default, and	2.70	2.75
Deductions for Child Maintenance		
deductions for child maintenance (standard)	5.40	5.50
deductions for child maintenance (lower)	2.70	2.75
Arrears of Community Charge		
court order against claimant	2.70	2.75
court order against couple	4.25	4.30
deductions from JSA (Cont.)		
Arrears of Community Charge, Council Tax, fines and overpayment recovery		
Age 16 to 17	10.83	10.96
Age 18 to 24	14.23	14.41
Age 25+	17.98	18.21

Weekly rates unless otherwise shown

	Rates	
	2002	*2003*
Maximum deduction for arrears of Child Support Maintenance		
Age 16 to 17	10.83	10.96
Age 18 to 24	14.23	14.41
Age 25 +	17.93	18.21
Maximum rates for recovery of overpayments in JSA(ib)		
ordinary overpayments	8.10	8.25
where claimant convicted of fraud	10.80	10.80
Reduction in benefit for strikers	29.00	29.50
Capital		
upper limit	8,000.00	8,000.00
amount disregarded	3,000.00	3,000.00
child's limit	3,000.00	3,000.00
upper limit of RC/NH	16,000.00	16,000.00
amount disregarded of RC/NH	10,000.00	10,000.00
upper limit (claimant/partner 60 or over)	12,000.00	12,000.00
amount disregarded (claimant/or partner 60 or over)	6,000.00	6,000.00
Tariff income		
£1 for every complete £250 or part thereof between amount of capital disregarded and capital upper limit		
Disregards		
standard earnings	5.00	5.00
couples earnings	10.00	10.00
higher earnings	20.00	20.00
war disablement pension and war widow's pension	10.00	10.00
voluntary and charitable payments	20.00	20.00
student loan	10.00	10.00
student's convenanted income	5.00	5.00
income from boarders: disregard the fixed amount (£20) plus 50 per cent. of the balance of the charge	20.00	20.00
Expenses for subtenants		
furnished or unfurnished	4.00	4.00
where heating is included, additional	9.40	9.65
Maternity Allowance		
Standard rate	75.00	100.00
MA threshold	30.00	30.00
Pension Credit (from October 2003)		
Standard minimum guarantee		
single		102.10
couple		155.80
Additional amount for severe disability		
single		42.95
couple (one qualifies)		42.95
couple (both qualifies)		85.90
Additional amount for carer		25.10
Savings credit theshold		
single		77.45
couple		123.80
Capital		
Amount disregard		6,000.00
Amount disregard–care homes		10,000.00
Deemed income £1 for each complete £500 or part thereof in excess of above amounts		
Housing costs		
Deduction for non-dependents:		
aged 18 or over, not in work or in work and in receipt of Pension Credit		7.40
aged 18 or over and in work:		
—gross income: less than £92		7.40
—gross income: £92 to £136.99		17.00
—gross income: £137 to £176.99		23.35

Written Ministerial Statements

Wednesday 20 November 2002

CABINET OFFICE

Regulatory Impact Assessments

The Minister of State, Cabinet Office (Mr. Douglas Alexander): The Government is committed to ensuring that regulations are necessary, give effective protection, balance cost and risk, are fair and command public confidence. In accordance with this, we require Departments to produce and publish RIAs for all regulatory proposals likely to have an impact on business.

I have today presented to Parliament a Command Paper listing RIAs published between 1st January and 30th June 2002. Copies of those listed have been placed in the libraries of both Houses. This is the seventeenth such Command Paper.

Risk Report

The Minister of State, Cabinet Office (Mr. Douglas Alexander): The Strategy Unit report, "Risk: improving government's capability to handle risk and uncertainty", is today being published.

The Government welcomes the report, and we have accepted its recommendations in full. They aim to improve the way we anticipate and handle risk in the day-to-day conduct of our business, to support the effective delivery of public services. The report's recommendations will be implemented through a two-year programme of change, led by the Cabinet Office Permanent Secretary, Sir David Omand.

The report looks particularly at those areas of government that involve handling risks that may affect the public, and makes a number of recommendations to improve the involvement of the public in decision making about risks that affect them. It proposes a set of principles that government should follow in handling risks to the public, on which we intend to consult.

Copies of the report have been placed in the Vote Office, the Printed Paper Office, and the libraries of both Houses.

HOME DEPARTMENT

National Policing Plan (2003–06)

The Minister of State for the Home Department (Mr. John Denham): I am, later today, laying the first National Policing Plan before Parliament as required by section 1 of the Police Reform Act 2002. It sets out the strategic priorities for the police service in 2003–06 as follows:

Tackling anti-social behaviour and disorder.

Reducing volume, street, drug-related and violent and gun crime in line with local and national targets.

Combating serious and organised crime operating across force boundaries.

Increasing the number of offences brought to justice.

The Plan will be a key element in raising the standards of policing to enable all forces to approach the standards of the best.

The National Policing Plan is a key element of police reform and sets out for the first time in one document, the performance targets and indicators against which delivery of priorities will be measured. The Plan describes those aspects of police reform, which will be in place over the next three years to support delivery.

HEALTH

Health Inequalities

The Secretary of State for Health (Mr. Alan Milburn): I am today publishing the results of the cross-cutting review of health inequalities, undertaken as part of the Government's 2002 spending review. The review sets out the Government's long-term approach for narrowing the gap in health between disadvantaged groups and the rest of the population.

Copies of "Tackling Health Inequalities: 2002 Cross-Cutting Review" have been placed in the Library, and it is also available on the Department's website at http://www.doh.gov.uk/healthinequalities

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

International Policing (Bosnia and Herzegovina)

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Bill Rammell): Every effort is being made to ensure that the transition of responsibility from the International Police Task Force (IPTF) to the European Union Police Mission (EUPM) goes smoothly with minimal disruption to stability in Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH). For example, personnel from the two missions are co-operating closely to ensure that information and expertise accumulated by the IPTF is transferred to the new Mission. In order to facilitate a smooth transition, an EUPM Planning Team has been established to prepare for the take-over and ensure that the hand-over is effective and thorough. Together these steps will ensure that the EUPM is well-equipped and capable of building on the progress achieved by the IPTF.

Commander Sven Frederiksen, currently Police Commissioner with the IPTF, will take up this same role with the EUPM thus ensuring that his expertise and experience as Head of Mission will be transferred to the EUPM. This will contribute further to the smooth transition which is crucial to the success of the new Mission.

In the transition of responsibility from the IPTF to the EUPM there is to be a change of emphasis in the mission mandate. Whereas the IPTF was working closely with police officers in the lower ranks of the BiH Police Service, the EUPM will be looking at reform at a more senior level within the Police Service as well as reform at a ministerial level. To achieve this,

contributing countries are providing officers with experience of different policing fields to transfer skills and expertise to the BiH police service.

The UK remains firmly committed to the peace process in BiH and will be contributing 56 police officers from 34 different police forces across the country, along with 9 civilians, to the EUPM. This comprises over 13 per cent of the total slots allocated to EU member states. All 15 EU member states are contributing personnel as well as seventeen further non-EU states. In total there will be around 500 police officers and civilian staff working in the EUPM.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Regional Development Agencies

The Minister for Employment Relations, Industry and the Regions (Alan Johnson): I have published the Regional Development Agencies' reported outputs for the first quarter of 2002–03. These have been placed in the Library of the House and on the DTI website at www.dti. gsi. gov.uk/rda/info/q 1 results.htm Regional Development Agencies' reported outputs in the first quarter of 2002–03.

The tables below show the Regional Development Agencies' Tier 3 targets for 2002–03 and the number of outputs they have reported as delivering by the end of the first quarter (June 2002). RDAs originally set out the annual targets in their Corporate Plans before the target definitions were finalised. Several RDAs have since chosen to rebase their Corporate Plan targets in line with the subsequently agreed methodology. For more information about the performance monitoring of the RDAs please see the DTI Website. A glossary of terms is at annex A.

The RDAs' have stated that the Q1 returns are close to profile, and that as a result, RDAs collectively are broadly on track to achieve their annual targets. When considering the figures below it is also worth bearing in mind the following points:

Some RDAs have been focusing attention on developing partnerships or schemes that are expected to deliver the majority of their results in the latter part of the year.

Since setting their annual targets some RDAs have identified new opportunities to deliver outputs and are consequently expecting to exceed their targets.

All outputs are reported on a Gross Attributable basis. Jobs created as a result of Foreign Direct Investment are reported on a gross basis to Invest UK and have been excluded from the Employment Opportunities table, below.

Table 1—Employment Opportunities: total number of job opportunities as a result of RDA activity—taking new and safeguarded jobs together.

Tier 3	*Annual Target*	*Output for quarter 1*
SWDA	6,450	597
EEDA	953	270
EMDA	5,150	340
ONE	7,449	608
NWDA	14,532	1,365
SEEDA	2,066	716
LDA	14,450	2,280
AWM	13,545	423
YF	10,500	1,262

Table 2—Business Performance: total number of new businesses added to the regional economy as a result of RDA activities.

Tier 3	*Annual Target*	*Output for quarter 1*
SWDA	700	26
EEDA	163	84
EMDA	470	33
ONE	406	21
NWDA	804	114
SEEDA	123	17
LDA	990	45
AWM	144	7
YF	700	61

Table 3—Brownfield Land: total number if hectares of land remediated to an acceptable condition and/or recycled into effective use as a result of RDA inputs and activities.

Tier 3	*Annual Target*	*Output for quarter 1*
SWDA	140	7
EEDA	23	0
EMDA	119	20
ONE	117	2
NWDA	442	110
SEEDA	40	7
LDA	30	23
AWM	259	72
YF	88	4

Table 4—Education and Skills: total number of learning opportunities and/or support provided or influenced as a direct result of RDA support.

Tier 3	*Annual Target*	*Output for quarter 1*
SWDA	5,400	2,240
EEDA	3,183	665
EMDA	2,375	441
ONE	18,014	1,726
NWDA	32,792	7,052
SEEDA	3,454	631
LDA	8,700	3,623
AWM	16,215	1,487
YF	14,000	2,408

GLOSSARY OF TERMS ANNEX A

Term	*Definition*
Corporate Plan	RDA plans which set out how resources will be used to achieve the objectives set out in their Regional Economic Strategy.
Gross	All outputs directly attributable to projects or programmes
Gross Attributable	Gross outputs that are directly attributable to RDA input, i.e. the RDA share of the outputs.
SWDA	South West Development Agency
EEDA	East of England Development Agency

Term	*Definition*
EMDA	Ease Midlands Development Agency
ONE	One NorthEast
NWDA	North West Development Agency
SEEDA	South East England Development Agency
LDA	London Development Agency
AWM	Advantage West Midlands
YF	Yorkshire Forward

WORK AND PENSIONS

Benefit Fraud (Islington)

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Mr. Malcolm Wicks): The Benefit Fraud Inspectorate's (BFI) follow up inspection report on the London Borough of Islington was published today and copies of the report have been placed in the Library.

The BFI first inspected and published a report on the London Borough of Islington in December 2000. The report found that the council had awarded a contract in 1998 to a company to deliver the benefit service on the council's behalf. However, the service was found to be totally inadequate, partly because of weaknesses in the contract but primarily because of the council's failure to manage or enforce it.

This follow up report finds that the London Borough of Islington had attempted to address many of the concerns raised in the first inspection.

The London Borough of Islington and its contractor were committed to improving the delivery of the benefit service, and were working closely to achieve this. Amendments to the contract had enabled the council to better manage the work of its contractor. Challenging targets had been introduced for the contractor, while comprehensive management information and a sound checking regime had been introduced to assist the council to monitor quality.

There had been a significant reduction in the backlog of work and level of customer dissatisfaction since the first inspection. However, at the time of the follow up inspection, claimants were waiting an average of 16 weeks to have their claims dealt with mainly because the council had not tackled the underlying problem of managing the claims process.

The council had significantly improved its counter fraud activities. It had a stable investigation team and it focused its efforts on the prosecution of fraudsters.

There had been no tangible improvement in the area of overpayment recovery. Although the council and its contractor had developed a strategy to deal with overpayment recovery, the delay in implementing this had allowed the outstanding debt to rise by 47 per cent. in 2 years.

The report concludes that the council had planted the seeds for improvement and now needed to ensure that it met its own expectations to deliver a quality benefit service. The BFI saw promising prospects for the council and its contractor to deliver the significant improvements needed for customers to receive a prompt and accurate benefit service.

In 2000–01, the London Borough of Islington administered approximately £122.4 million in housing benefits.

The report makes recommendations to help the council address the remaining weaknesses and to further improve the administration of Housing Benefit and Council Tax Benefit, as well as counter fraud activities.

My Rt hon Friend the Secretary of State is now considering the report and will be asking the council for its proposals in response to the findings and recommendations of the BFI.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Pet Travel Scheme

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mr. Elliott Morley): On 1 July I indicated that the Government was minded to extend the very successful Pet Travel Scheme to the USA and Canada but would not do so until clarification had been obtained of some points raised in a peer review of a scientific assessment of the risk of importing rabies into the UK if the Pet Travel Scheme was extended to the USA and Canada.

I am pleased to say that the further work I commissioned has confirmed the results of the earlier risk assessment; extending the Pet Travel Scheme to the USA and Canada will not significantly increase the risk of importing rabies. The Government has decided therefore to extend the Pet Travel Scheme to those countries.

I have today laid before Parliament a Statutory Instrument giving effect to this decision. It will come into effect on Wednesday 11 December 2002. From that date cats and dogs from the USA, which comply with the requirements of the Pet Travel Scheme can enter the UK without going into quarantine for six months. My officials are discussing with appropriate organisations the approval of routes and certification. Until these are available cats and dogs from the USA and Canada will have to spend a short time in quarantine—no more than 3–4 days, while all their documentation is checked. If the animal and documentation meets the requirements of the Pet Travel Scheme the animal will qualify for early release from quarantine.

The European Union is expected to adopt early next year a Regulation on the movement of pet animals. This is based on the same principles as the UK Pet Travel Scheme, which will then form part of the EU system, although we have obtained derogations to continue all aspects of our current scheme, such as the tick and tapeworm testing. Future decisions, about how animals arriving in the UK will be treated, will be dealt with under the procedure laid down in the Council Regulation, when adopted.

Written Ministerial Statements

Thursday 21 November 2002

PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE

Committee on Standards in Public Life

The Prime Minister (Mr. Tony Blair): I am pleased to announce that the Eighth Report of the Committee on Standards in Public Life, entitled "Standards of Conduct in the House of Commons", has been published today by the Committee. Copies are available in the Vote Office and the Libraries.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Freedom of Information Act

The Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (Yvette Cooper): My right hon. and noble Friend the Lord Chancellor has today announced that he has placed copies of the Codes of Practice under sections 45 and 46 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 in the Libraries of both Houses.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Telecommunications

The Minister for E-Commerce and Competitiveness (Mr. Stephen Timms): The Department has concluded that there is not a strong enough case for changes to the current regulatory framework. Responses to the consultation highlighted the ultimate cost to the consumer of all of the options identified.

However, the Department will continue to work with operators and users to encourage the maintenance of adequate contingency plans against the possibility of any future operator failure.

Regional Development Agencies

The Minister for Employment Relations, Industry and the Regions (Alan Johnson): As part of a rolling programme of appointments, I have decided to appoint 23 new members to the Regional Development Agency boards outside London; the Mayor of London makes appointments to the LDA. The names of the new Board members are set out below.

Twenty-two of these appointments begin on 14 December 2002 and are for three years, expiring on 13 December 2005. To fill a current vacancy, Bryony Rudkin took up post on the EEDA Board on the 14 November. The rolling programme enables the boards to be refreshed and bring new talent and ideas to the boards on a regular basis. I have placed further details of the new appointees in the library of both Houses.

Decisions on appointments have been made following open competition and following consultation with key national and regional players.

NWDA	**SEEDA**
Robert Johnston	Sarah Hohler
Maureen Williams	Terry Mills
	Poul Christensen
	Keith House
	John Peel
EMDA	**YF**
Neville Jackson	John Napier
Ross Willmott	Julie Kenny
EEDA	**ONE NorthEast**
George Kieffer	Christine Smith
Stephen Castle	Keith Taylor
Bryony Rudkin	Kevin Rowan
	Chey Garland
SW RDA	**AWM**
Henry Studholme	Ahmed Hassam
Judith Reynolds	Richard Hyde
Professor Eric Thomas	

Flexible Working

The Minister for Employment Relations, Industry and the Regions (Alan Johnson): I am today laying before Parliament an affirmative Statutory Instrument which details the procedure which the employer will have a statutory duty to follow when an eligible employee makes an application to work flexibly under the new right.

These new regulations provide the detail to the flexible working provision set out in broad terms in the Employment Act 2002, which received Royal Assent in July. They detail each stage of the procedure and how decisions on applications to work flexibly should be notified to the employee. They also provide an employee with a right to be accompanied at the meeting to discuss the application and, if necessary, at appeal. A companion may be any worker employed by the same employer. The regulations also specify the procedure for making a complaint to an employment tribunal when an employer fails to comply with the right to be accompanied and allows a tribunal to make an award of up to two weeks' pay. A week's pay will be subject to the cap provided under the Employment Rights Act 1996.

These regulations, subject to their approval by both Houses, will be followed by two negative Statutory Instruments. One will set out the details of the eligibility criteria, complaints and remedies. These specify that the maximum amount of compensation an employment tribunal may award for breaches of the procedure (other than failure to allow a companion) or where a decision by the employer to reject the application is based on incorrect facts, is eight week's pay. A week's pay will again be subject to the cap. The other negative Statutory Instrument will concern the extension of the ACAS arbitration scheme to cover the right to request.

The detail of this new right has been the subject of a three-month public consultation. The right will come into effect next April, at the same time as the Government extends maternity leave and pay and introduces paid paternity and adoption leave. Together these new rights will provide more choice and support

for working parents to help them balance their work and family responsibilities, to the benefit of employers, employees and their children.

A Regulatory Impact Assessment will be placed in the libraries of both Houses today.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Arcade Gaming Machines

The Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Tessa Jowell): *A Safe Bet for Success*, which we published in March 2002, set out the Government's plans for the overall reform of the controls on gambling. We said that we would categorise gaming machines into four groups. Within these categories, Group D amusement machines would have maximum stakes and prizes of 10p and £5 and would be playable by children. Machines in groups A to C would have maximum stakes and prizes of more than 10p and £5, and would not be playable by children.

We have had representations from the gaming machines and arcades industry about machines with non-money prizes, often called 'crane' machines, which are extensively played by children, especially in arcades at the seaside. These currently operate on a maximum stake of 30p, and their operators have pointed out to us that they will not be commercially viable if their stake is reduced to 10p.

The Government believes that children and gambling should be kept apart and has taken careful note of the conclusions which the Select Committee on Culture, Media and Sport have reached on this issue.

But it is important not to endanger the traditions of family entertainment at the seaside, which people have enjoyed for generations.

We are determined as part of our ongoing reform of the controls on gambling to listen carefully to the business sectors involved, and we recognise that there is a case for allowing children's and family amusement machines which do not offer money or exchangeable token or ticket prizes to keep their current maximum stake of 30p.

We have therefore decided that the stake limit which we will propose to Parliament for Category D amusement machines will be 30p if the machine does not offer prizes in money or exchangeable tickets and tokens, and 10p in all other cases.

This will not affect the maximum prize limit which we wish to see for these machines, which will remain at £5. Nor will it affect the stake and prize limits for machines paying out exchangeable tickets and tokens, which will remain at 10p and £5 respectively.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

Marking St. Andrew's Day Overseas

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr. Jack Straw): British Posts abroad are committed to promoting the interests of Scotland—as well as England, Wales and Northern Ireland—365 days a year. In addition, they are also actively involved in marking St Andrew's Day and the other Patron Saints' Days of the United Kingdom where English, Scottish, Welsh and Northern Irish communities, both large and small, are represented in local populations.

St Andrew's Day events will take place across the world from major European and US cities, to further afield in, South America, Australia, New Zealand, Africa and South East Asia. Posts have been involved in many of these events, and senior representatives at Post will be attending events organised by the local community. Senior representatives at Posts and prominent members of the local Scottish Societies will deliver a joint message from my right hon. Friend Secretary of State for Scotland and the First Minister of Scotland.

DEFENCE

Departmental Performance Report and Resource Accounts

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Geoffrey Hoon): Information about the Department's performance during the last financial year is contained in

> the Ministry of Defence Performance Report 2001–2002, which will be laid before the House tomorrow as Cm 5661 and
>
> the Ministry of Defence Consolidated Departmental Resource Accounts 2001–02, which will be laid before the House today as HC47.

Copies of these reports will be placed in the Library of the House. We will also publish them on the Ministry of Defence website.

HEATH

National Health Service University

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr. John Hutton): I am today publishing for consultation a development plan for a new corporate university for the National Health Service—which will initially be known as the "NHSU", and which we intend will be called the "National Health Service University" when it meets the relevant criteria to be granted full university status.

The NHSU will offer training and development for everyone at every level of the NHS. This includes those staff who may not have experienced learning since leaving school. It will make learning a right for all staff in the NHS. By unlocking the potential of staff, NHSU will make a key contribution to the development and modernisation of the NHS and support the effective delivery and implementation of the NHS Plan.

The focus of the learning opportunities, training and development offered will be improving services for patients.

Copies of the consultation document, 'Learning for Everyone', have been placed in the Library. Copies can also be obtained through the NHSU's own website at: www.nhsu.nhs.uk.

The consultation process will end on 21 February 2003.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Victims and Witnesses

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mr. David Blunkett): My right hon. Friends the Lord Chancellor, the Attorney General and I have today jointly issued a short summary document about the measures we have already taken, and are planning, to improve services and support to victims and witnesses of crime. The paper, entitled "A Better Deal for Victims and Witnesses", also highlights those parts of the Criminal Justice Bill, introduced today, which will benefit directly victims of crime. Our programme of reform is guided by a single clear priority—to rebalance the criminal justice system in favour of the victim and the community so as to reduce crime and bring more offenders to justice.

Copies of the summary document have been placed in the Vote Office and the Library.

Written Answers to Questions

Friday 15 November 2002

TREASURY

Pre-Budget Report

Mr. Ivan Henderson: To ask Mr Chancellor of the Exchequer when he plans to deliver his pre-Budget Report to the House. [81481]

Mr. Gordon Brown: On Wednesday 27 November.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

EU Enlargement

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what *(a)* bilateral, and *(b)* multilateral aid she will continue to provide to EU candidate countries after accession; how much aid will be given; to which countries; and through which bodies. [78670]

Clare Short: My Department will not have any further responsibility for supporting newly acceding countries to the European Union after accession, either bilaterally or multilaterally.

Food Aid (Africa)

Tony Baldry: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what the level of food security is in *(a)* Mozambique, *(b)* Angola, *(c)* Zambia, *(d)* Zimbabwe, *(e)* Malawi and *(f)* Swaziland; and if she will make a statement. [74614]

Clare Short: National Early Warning Units have estimated cereal requirements in all these countries, except Angola, for the marketing year April 2002 to March 2003. The World Food Programme (WFP) has provided estimates on import progress to 21 October 2002. National figures are detailed in the table.

Metric tonnes

	Domestic cereal gap April 2002 to March 2003	*Commercial and Government imports*	*Food aid delivered*	*Remaining cereal gap at 21 October 2002*
Mozambique	380,000	233,000	63,000	84,000
Zambia	684,000	0	18,770	665,230
Zimbabwe	1,654,000	410,000	84,853	1,159,147
Malawi	277,000	194,000	149,008	+66,008
Swaziland	121,000	28,000	4,000	88,200

Additional planned imports and pledged food aid will reduce the cereal gap further, but timing of these deliveries remains uncertain. The Southern African Development Community (SADC) is beginning a further series of vulnerability assessments, which will provide revised figures for humanitarian assistance needs to the end of March 2003. These assessments will be available in mid-December. WFP's emergency operation for the southern Africa humanitarian crisis is now 50 per cent. funded, ensuring that its food pipeline to the most vulnerable populations is secure at least until the end of 2002. We continue to press other donors to respond effectively to the crisis, so that the food aid pipeline can be sustained until the next harvest in April 2003.

The humanitarian situation in Angola is also very serious. Since the ceasefire, aid agencies have been able to reach many thousands more severely malnourished people, and WFP's caseload is expected to reach at least 1.9 million people by the end of the year. WFP's maize stocks for Angola are expected to run out in December unless donors act quickly to replenish the food pipeline. We are working closely with other donors and implementing partners to develop a consensus view on future needs in Angola, and remain at the forefront of diplomatic and political efforts to ensure that adequate levels of humanitarian assistance continue to be delivered.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what is being done to build food distribution networks in *(a)* Malawi, *(b)* Mozambique, *(c)* Zimbabwe, *(d)* Zambia, *(e)* Lesotho and *(f)* Swaziland. [66178]

Clare Short: WFP has a major role in the regional humanitarian assistance effort. In addition to supporting food procurement, transport and in-country distribution costs within our £18.25 million support for the new regional appeal, DFID has funded logistical experts in the WFP regional office in Johannesburg, and in Zimbabwe and Lesotho national offices to strengthen capacity to plan and manage supply and transport issues.

DFID is active in each country to promote effective co-ordination between international, bilateral and non-governmental organisations to tackle operational constraints. Jointly with other donors, we have urged SADC and regional governments to reduce regulatory and administrative obstacles to food supply for humanitarian and private sector actors alike.

Adam Smith Institute

Dr. Tonge: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many contracts her Department has had with the Adam Smith Institute over the last three years; and if she will break them down by *(a)* subject and *(b)* value. [72773]

Clare Short: The information requested is in the following table.

Project title	*Value (£)*	*Country*
Support for capacity building in the Ministry of Finance and Central bank	1,229,655	Afghanistan
Trade training for DFID staff(Bangkok	32,328	United Kingdom
Trade training for DFID staff	20,075	United Kingdom
Consultants for Standards, Technical Regulatory Barriers Programme	43,990	Global[2]
Pilot training and capacity building in international waterhouse law	131,174	Kyrgyz Republic
Trade enabling agreement	[1] 0	Global[2]
Communications film for Department of Disinvestments	89,500	India
Support for public sector undertaking reforms and social safety net in Madhya Pradesh	80,000	India
PSRC: water privatisation and regulatory study tour	54,924	Tanzania
Conference on Disinvestment	70,000	India
Russia trade policy project	1,199,041	Russia
Lead adviser to Parastatal Sector Reform Commission (PSRC)	195,690	Tanzania
Seminar on Export Credits and Developing Countries	101,035	United Kingdom
Rehabilitation of cyclone damaged lift irrigation points in Orissa	622,736	India
Initial support to the budgetary processes of the Government of Macedonia	13,630	Macedonia
Medium term programme of Capacity Building for Public Utilities Regulatory Commission	636,900	Ghana
UK-Ireland privatisation and regulation study tour	11,145	Tanzania
Additional support to the Privatisation Board	106,241	Bangladesh
Assistance to the Palestinian Negotiations Affairs Department	1,482,776	West Bank and Gaza
Technical assistance for public enterprise reform in Orissa	2,061,365	India
Privatisation Agency support project consultancy	308,470	Zimbabwe

[1] This is an enabling agreement only, which allows small contracts for individual pieces of work to be set up as and when required. It therefore has no overall commitment.
[2] Non Project specific

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

EU Aid

Mr. Baron: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions she has had with her EU counterparts regarding the distribution of the EU overseas aid package. [77191]

Clare Short: I have been asked to reply.

I discussed the performance of the EC development programmes with EU Development Ministers at the 30 May Development Council. We agreed that recent reforms had been welcome but that further significant improvement was needed to implement the agreed, poverty-focused Development Policy adopted by Ministers in November 2000. Since then the Development council has been abolished. I will meet EU Development Ministers again at the General Affairs and External Relations Council (GAERC) on 18–19 November.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Assets Recovery Agency

Mr. Dodds: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) how much has been seized in Northern Ireland by the Assets Recovery Agency since its formation; [79422]

(2) how many people are employed by the Assets Recovery Agency in Northern Ireland; [79423]

(3) what the funding is for financial year 2002–03 of the Northern Ireland arm of the Assets Recovery Agency. [79427]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: I have been asked to reply.

I will write to the hon. Member and place a copy of my letter in the Library.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 18 November 2002

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Air Quality

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs which organisations are responsible for monitoring air quality. [80503]

Alun Michael: In England, legal responsibility for monitoring ambient air quality lies with the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. In addition the Environment Agency is responsible for ambient air quality monitoring arrangements in relation to regulated industrial processes in England and Wales. Local authorities are responsible for reviewing and assessing ambient air quality in their areas. This usually includes some monitoring of key pollutants. Defra manages the United Kingdom ambient air quality monitoring network on behalf of the Government and the devolved administrations.

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what air quality targets have been set by her Department over the last five years; [80507]

(2) what procedure is followed to review air quality targets; [80515]

(3) what plans she has to implement higher air quality targets. [80502]

Alun Michael: The Government set out their targets for safeguarding people's health and protecting the environment from air pollution in the Air Quality Strategy for England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, which was first published in 1997 and revised in January 2000. The strategy includes health-based standards for benzene, 1,3-butadiene, carbon monoxide, lead, particles, sulphur dioxide, nitrogen dioxide and low level ozone. It also includes policy objectives for each pollutant to be achieved between 2003 and 2008. On 5 August 2002 we announced tighter objectives for particles, benzene and carbon monoxide and introduced a new objective for polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons.

Section 20 of the Environment Act 1995 requires the Secretary of State to keep the Air Quality Strategy and its standards, objectives and measures under regular review. The Secretary of State is required to consult with a wide range of interests and organisations on any proposals to modify the strategy. We carried out a comprehensive review of the overall strategy and its objectives between 1997 and 1999. A further review began in 2000, concentrating on strengthening three of the current objectives and adding an objective for a new pollutant. We intend that the next review, which is likely to begin during 2003, should focus more on progress towards meeting the objectives, rather than on objectives themselves. Should new evidence emerge, however, which indicates that existing air quality targets should be amended, or new ones introduced, this will be taken into account in future reviews.

Countryside Stewardship Scheme

Mr. Hurst: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many participants there are in the Countryside Stewardship scheme *(a)* in England and *(b)* in each of the English regions. [80479]

Alun Michael: The total number of Countryside Stewardship scheme agreement holders within England as at October 2001 was 14,225. This is broken down by Government Office region as follows:

Region	*Number of agreements*
East Midlands	1,540
Eastern	1,632
Greater London	68
North East	954
North West	1,629
South East	2,016
South West	3,147
West Midlands	1,511
Yorkshire/Humberside	1,728
Total	14,225

Rights of Way

Dr. Naysmith: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when her Department will make an announcement on whether the new rights of access under Part 1 of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 will be implemented on a regional basis; and if she will make a statement. [80808]

Alun Michael: I am strongly in favour of implementing the new rights of access to open country on a region by region basis but additional costs and organisational issues have to be addressed. Work is currently being undertaken to make sure that early commencement is a practical proposition. Our aim is to make this historic new right a reality as soon as is practicable and I shall announce a decision shortly.

Slaughter Premium Scheme Payments

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many farm businesses were in receipt of slaughter premium during each of the last three years. [80141]

Alun Michael: Information is available only on the number of producers who received slaughter premium scheme payments. These details are set out in the table. Because the scheme in Great Britain was administered by different Government Departments in relation to the over and under thirty-month elements of the scheme, there is an element of double counting. Full details are given in the footnotes.

Number of producers to receive payment under the Slaughter Premium Scheme

	2000[1]	2001[2]	2002[3]
England			
Adult		33,264	29,076
UTM[1]	30,560		
OTM[1]	26,090		
Veal	75	825	490
Total			
Wales			
Adult		8,178	6,886
UTM[1]	5,322		
OTM[1]	7,137		
Veal	14	112	78
Total			
Scotland			
Adult			7,776
UTM[1]	5,566	6,561	
OTM[1]	6,006	4,963	
Veal	2	0	16
Total			
Northern Ireland			
Adult	19,898	19,286	11,873
Veal	243	217	97
Total			

[1] UTM = under thirty months. OTM = over thirty months.

[2] The figures quoted here are the number of producers who have received payments.

[3] The 2002 scheme is still open. The figures quoted are the number of producers who have submitted claims for premium so far.

Notes:

England and Wales

During the 2000 scheme year, the Slaughter Premium Scheme for England and Wales was administered as two separate schemes. The UTM element for England was administered by the then Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF), and the OTM and UTM element was administered by the then Intervention Board. In 2001, these elements were combined for producers in England and Wales.

Scotland

During the 2000 and 2001 scheme years, the OTM element of the scheme was administered by the Intervention Board, and latterly, the Rural Payments Agency (RPA). Scottish Executive Environment and Rural Affairs Department (SEERAD) administered the UTM element. In 2002, SEERAD took over the full responsibility for both elements and combined them to run as one adult scheme.

Northern Ireland

Department of Agriculture and Rural Development (DARD) have administered the adult scheme as one element since the 2000 scheme year.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Cyprus

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the new UN plan for a settlement in Cyprus; and if he will make a statement. [80493]

Mr. MacShane: The British Government received a copy of the UN Secretary-General's proposals for a comprehensive settlement of the Cyprus problem on 11 November in our capacity as a Guarantor Power of Cyprus. We will be studying these proposals carefully, particularly in so far as they affect our responsibilities under the 1960 Treaty of Guarantee, and will be responding to Kofi Annan in due course.

The Government warmly welcome the UN Secretary-General's decision to table his proposals for bridging the remaining gaps after the months of negotiations between the two sides. We believe this is a timely initiative which we will be giving our full support.

As my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary said in a press statement on 11 November, the British Government believe that there is now the best chance to solve the Cyprus Problem in decades, and that this opportunity is not likely to recur in the foreseeable future. We will be working with all those concerned for a positive outcome.

Democratic Republic of the Congo

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what further information he has received from the UN in relation to the allegations set out in the UN Panel of Experts report on the Illegal Exploitation of Natural Resources and Other Forms of Wealth of the DRC. [80934]

Mr. Rammell: We have requested more information from the UN, but have not yet received a response.

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to introduce targeted sanctions against businesses or individuals profiting from the trade in conflict goods as referred to in paragraph 143 of the final report of the Panel of Experts on the alleged exploitation of natural resources and other kinds of wealth of the Democratic Republic of the Congo. [81323]

Mr. Rammell: The proposal to introduce targeted sanctions is one of a wide range of recommendations made by the UN expert panel report being considered by Whitehall departments. In consultations at the UN on 13 November, a number of states asked for more information to be made available to substantiate the report's allegations. The UK has also asked the UN directly for more information, but has not yet received a response.

At the 13 November consultations, the UN panel's chairman—Ambassador Kassem—restated that the panel would recommend a grace period of 5–6 months before imposing any sanctions, to allow the accused individuals and companies a chance to change their working practices.

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to follow the recommendations set out in paragraph 176 of the report of the UN Panel of Experts in request of companies and individuals listed in Annex 1 and 11 of the report whose operations are carried out in whole or in part of the UK. [81324]

Mr. Rammell: The recommendations made by the UN Expert Panel report are being considered by Whitehall Departments. At Security Council consultations on 13 November, a number of states asked that more information be made available to substantiate the

report's allegations. The UK has also asked the UN for more information directly, but has not yet received a response.

IT Security

Brian White: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he has taken to review the security of the Department's IT system; and how many digital attacks there were on the Department's system in *(a)* October and *(b)* 2002. [80776]

Mr. Rammell: FCO IT security advisers have carried out limited reviews of the FCO's IT system in the UK. A full penetration test will be conducted on the upgraded system in 2003.

The number of cases of digital attacks detected was *(a)* nil in October and *(b)* nil in 2002.

John Bredenkamp

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations British Government officials in *(a)* Zimbabwe and *(b)* other African countries have received over the last two years from John Bredenkamp and other representatives of ACS with regard to the sale of military equipment manufactured by BAe Systems; and when such representatives were received. [81320]

Mr. Rammell: None since the UK arms embargo of May 2000.

Zimbabwe

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will launch an investigation into the supply of spare parts for the Zimbabwean Air Force's Mark 60 Hawk fighters. [80927]

Mr. Rammell: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 4 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 72W.

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on what legislative and other changes he proposes to make to the sanctions arrangements in relation to Zimbabwe. [80928]

Mr. Rammell: EU sanctions on Zimbabwe have been extended twice since 18 February, on 22 July and 13 September. We keep the policy under constant review.

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) whether British Government officials in *(a)* Zimbabwe and *(b)* other African countries have had discussions over the last two years with John Bredenkamp *(i)* with regard to facilitating sales of military equipment from the UK and *(ii)* other matters; [81319]

(2) what discussions his Department has had with BAE Systems concerning the supply of spare parts to the Zimbabwean Air Force for their Mark 60 Hawk fighters. [80926]

Mr. Rammell: In the last 12 months, we are aware of two meetings and two telephone conversations between John Bredenkamp and British High Commission officials in Zimbabwe, all at Mr. Bredenkamp's initiative. In one meeting, Mr. Bredenkamp raised the allegations that had been made against him in the House on 6 March.

We are not aware of any conversations between Mr. Bredenkamp and officials in other African countries. I will write to the hon. Member if I receive any further relevant information.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

BBC (Scotland)

Annabelle Ewing : To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what discussions she has had with the Director-General of the BBC concerning the BBC's forthcoming review of news and current affairs output in Scotland. [81373]

Dr. Howells: My right hon. Friend has not held any such discussions with the Director-General of the BBC.

Alcohol Licences

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment her Department has made of the additional cost to local authorities if responsibility for alcohol licences is transferred from the magistrates courts. [81384]

Dr. Howells: There will be no additional burden on local authorities. Following the transfer of responsibility for alcohol licensing from the licensing justices to local authorities as proposed in the Licensing Bill, licensing fees will be set at a level that fully recovers the costs to local authorities and industry.

Charter Marks (Libraries)

12. **Linda Perham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many public libraries have received a Charter Mark award. [81379]

Mr. Caborn: 61 Charter Marks have been awarded to library services since the scheme came into operation 10 years ago.

National Lottery

13. **Dr. Palmer:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what representations she has received on improvements to the distribution of lottery grants. [81380]

Tessa Jowell: We have received over 400 responses to the review of Lottery funding consultation paper launched in July. These include views from voluntary and community organisations, charities, local government, hon. Members, distributors and individual members of the public.

Licensing Hours

14. **Mr. Pickthall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans she has to tackle binge-drinking associated with the 11 o'clock closing of pubs. [81381]

Dr. Howells: The Licensing Bill will introduce flexible opening hours—with the potential for up to 24 hour opening seven days a week, although we expect most premises to extend their opening hours to a more modest extent. This will discourage the culture of binge-drinking before last orders, stimulate a more mature attitude towards alcohol consumption, and help reduce public disorder resulting from artificially early fixed closing times.

School Sport

15. **Hugh Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what support the Government is giving to sport in schools. [81382]

Mr. Caborn: £459 million is being invested by DCMS and DfES to transform physical education, school sport and club links over the next three years. The funding will help deliver a joint DfES/DCMS Public Service Agreement target to increase the percentage of children who spend at least two hours a week on high quality PE and school sport in and beyond school—to 75 per cent. by 2006.

Youth Sport

16. **Mr. Randall:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what measures she intends to take to improve sports opportunities for young people. [81383]

Mr. Caborn: We are working with DfES, Sport England, governing bodies and other partners to transform sports opportunities for young people both in school and in their communities. Initiatives include building on the foundations of the Specialist Sports College and School Sport Co-ordinator programmes, investing in local sports clubs facilities and junior provision and improving the range and quality of provision for gifted and talented young sports people.

27. **Phil Sawford:** What her Department has done to improve participation rates of young people in sporting activities. [81395]

Mr. Caborn: The Government is supporting a variety of initiatives to encourage and assist participation in sport by young people. For example, in September 2002 some 750 school sport co-ordinators and 3,500 primary or special school link teachers were in place working in 142 partnerships across England. In the community, the 45 county sports partnerships have developed 279 junior sport development plans and Sport England has been helping young people to improve their sporting skills through a co-ordinated programme that will provide access to organised sport.

Tourism

18. **Mr. Tynan:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the promotion of UK tourism, while respecting the district identities of Scotland, England and Wales. [81385]

Dr. Howells: On 31 October we announced plans to develop a lead Government body for inbound tourism to Britain and the marketing of England within Britain. This will create a more coherent marketing focus across Britain, one that ensures that England, Scotland and Wales retain and develop strong separate brand identities to attract both domestic and overseas holidaymakers.

Under-age Drinking

19. **Mr. Blizzard:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what measures she is taking to clamp down on under-age drinking. [81386]

Dr. Howells: The licensing Bill has a clear focus on protecting children from harm. For the first time, it will be an offence to sell alcohol anywhere to under 18s. In addition, the package of measures in the White Paper, around which the Bill is based, made provision to legalise test purchasing to aid enforcement.

Museums and Galleries

20. **Rob Marris:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what measures her Department is taking to improve museums and galleries in the regions. [81387]

Tessa Jowell: We will be providing £70 million for regional museums from this year until 2005–06.

Extra funding will also be made available to the national museums to enable them to work in partnership with regional museums. Additionally there will be funds from the Department for Education and Skills to support museums' education.

Elite Athletes

21. **Bob Spink:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on the world class performance funding programme. [81388]

Mr. Caborn: This is a lottery funded programme which supports the training and preparation programmes for elite athletes who have the potential to win medals, or equivalent, in significant international competitions and events such as the Olympics and Paralympics, now and within the next four years. UK Sport provides funds to UK governing bodies for athletes who compete exclusively or primarily for the UK or Great Britain, while Sport England funds English governing bodies for athletes who represent England.

Elgin Marbles

22. **Mr. Dismore:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans she has to visit Athens to discuss the issue of the Parthenon Sculptures with the Greek Government. [81389]

Tessa Jowell: I have no plans to visit Greece. However, my right hon. Friend the Minister for Sport will be visiting Greece in December when I hope that he will have the opportunity to meet the Greek Under Secretary for Culture to discuss other cultural issues.

Football

23. **Mr. Betts:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport whether she will make a statement on the future governance of football in England. [81390]

Mr. Caborn: The Football Association remains the overall governing body for football in England. The Association will shortly begin the process of appointing a new Chief Executive, and that is no concern of the Government. The Independent Football Commission will continue its important work of considering complaints made against the Association, and football's other governing bodies, under the sport's customer service charters.

Sporting and Fitness Activities

25. **Sue Doughty:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what discussions she has had with the Secretary of State for Health about increasing the effectiveness of preventive health care through the encouragement of greater national participation in sporting and fitness activities. [81392]

Mr. Caborn: I chair monthly cross-governmental ministerial meetings, attended by Ministers from the Department of Health, where issues relating to sports policy are discussed, including the role that greater participation in sport and physical activity can have in improving health. My Department has also been working closely with the Department of Health to ensure effective coordination of sport and health policy.

Media Regulation

26. **Mr. Soley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what recent meetings she has had with the Press Complaints Commission about regulation of the media. [81393]

Dr. Howells: Whilst my right hon. Friend has not met with the Press Complaints Commission (PCC) recently, the Department continues to monitor closely the effectiveness of the newspaper industry's self regulatory system, and my Ministerial colleagues and I have no hesitation in suggesting improvements to the PCC and the industry, as and when appropriate.

Local Radio

28. **Mr. Pond:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans she has to ensure that independent local radio reflects the identity of local communities. [81396]

Dr. Howells: We recognise the importance of maintaining the distinctive local basis of commercial radio. We therefore propose to retain key local ownership rules, and to give Ofcom a duty to protect and promote local content.

Young Artists

29. **Miss Begg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what financial support is available to young British artists. [81397]

Dr. Howells: The Arts Council of England has provided £1.5 million over the last three years for developing and supporting individual artists. In addition, ACE funds a number of organisations to provide studio space, resource and training to artists like Studio Space in London which receives £60,000 per annum and offers 400 studios to artists. The Government has also invested £40 million in Creative Partnerships which will help develop the artists of the future.

Olympic Games

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what recent representations and discussions she has had about a potential London bid for the 2012 Olympics. [81391]

Mr. Caborn: Officials from my Department have held regular meetings during this year with all the key stakeholders to discuss the implications of London bidding to host the 2012 Olympic Games. These stakeholders were the Greater London Authority, the British Olympic Association, UK Sport and Sport England. In addition all interested Government Departments have been involved in assessing the ARUP report on the Costs and Benefits of a 2012 London Olympic Bid. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has met the Mayor of London and will meet the British Olympic Association and other non-government stakeholders to discuss the practicalities of such a bid.

DEFENCE

Bullying

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps has he taken to eliminate bullying from HM armed forces. [80614]

Dr. Moonie: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given on 4 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 57W, by my right hon. Friend the Minister of State for the Armed Forces to my hon. Friend the Member for Selby (Mr. Grogan).

Service Personnel

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many are serving in each of HM armed forces; how many of these are serving in *(a)* Great Britain, *(b)* Northern Ireland, *(c)* Germany and *(d)* each other overseas posting. [80615]

Dr. Moonie: I refer my hon. Friend to Tri-Service Publication (TSP) 6 Global Location of Service Personnel. A copy of which is held in the Library of the House.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Basic Education

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on progress in meeting the global aim of a basic education for every child by 2015; in which countries her Department supports education; and what recent evaluation her Department has made of the impact of her Department's programmes on meeting its education targets. [80553]

Clare Short: We recognise the huge importance of the education and gender equality targets within the Millennium Development Goals. We have fully

achieved the goals in this area set in our current Public Service Agreement, but there is a huge challenge in getting to the 2015 objectives. Our willingness to put more resources into universal primary education is demonstrated by our new PSA target (20 million more children in schools in 20 countries by 2006), and by plans for support to education. This forecast support for basic education amounts to £1.3 billion over the next five years, either through education sector support or direct budget support. Of this, about £500 million will go to Africa and £800 million to Asia. The figure of £1.3 billion forecast for the next five years exceeds the £700 million committed to UPE since 1997. These spending figures are forecasts, not targets or commitments, and depend on agreeing high quality programmes with our partners.

Education

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what plans are in place to maintain the quality of education in the commitment to reach the millennium target on improving access to education. [80556]

Clare Short: Improving the quality of education is recognised as a key requirement of national education policies. Quality issues are therefore addressed in all our education programmes in developing countries.

Fast Track Education Initiative

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what financial support her Department has provided to the fast track education initiative established by the World bank. [80555]

Clare Short: We are working to improve the fast track initiative so that it is embedded in country-led processes. We will provide support within our overall programme of support for Education for All. This means that there must be respect for local priorities and integration into poverty reduction strategy and medium-term economic framework processes. There must also be a recognition that money is only one ingredient in achieving progress and, that in many cases, significant absorptive capacity problems must be addressed before additional funds can be used effectively. There also needs to be much more emphasis on the five high population countries (India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nigeria and DRC) where so many of the out-of-school children are. A substantial proportion of the £1.3 billion, which we are forecasting to spend on basic education over the next five years, will be committed in fast track countries, particularly these five.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development (1) what contribution her Department is making to the G8 education fast track initiative in low income countries; [80938]

(2) what progress is being made towards the selection of additional low income countries for inclusion in the G8 education fast track initiative; [80937]

(3) what progress has been made towards the implementation of the G8 education fast track initiative in low income countries. [80939]

Clare Short: Our forecast support for basic education amounts to £1.3 billion over the next five years, either through education sector support or direct budget support. Of this, about £500million will go to Africa and £800million to Asia. A substantial proportion will go to low income countries included within the Fast Track Initiative, notably to the five high population countries with large numbers of children out of school (India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nigeria, DRC) which the Government successfully pressed to have included in the initiative. These spending figures are forecasts, not targets or commitments, and depend on agreeing high quality programmes with our partners.

Countries vary in the rate of progress they are making in preparing their proposals for fast track support. The UK is stressing that it is important to get the process right rather than to rush ahead with ill-prepared plans. We are therefore working to ensure that the initiative is rooted in existing country processes and that proposals are consistent with each country's medium-term expenditure framework and poverty reduction strategy.

Democatic Republic of the Congo

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on whether she plans to make aid disbursements to Burundi, Rwanda and Uganda conditional on compliance with relevant agreements in the Lusaka peace process and on verifiable measures taken to halt the illegal and illicit exploitation of the resources of the Democratic Republic of the Congo as recommended by the report of the UN Panel of Experts. [81321]

Clare Short: Compliance with the terms of Lusaka and other regional peace agreements has been taken into account in assessing the nature and scale of our development partnerships with Burundi, Rwanda and Uganda, and their responses to the UN Panel report will be factored into future assessments. The recent decisions by the Rwandan and Ugandan Governments to withdraw their forces from the DRC have been significant and very positive contributions to the fulfilment of the Lusaka accord and to the goal of peace in the DRC.

Afghanistan

Mr. Swire: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much money was pledged by Her Majesty's Government to Afghanistan to help rebuild that country since October 2001; how much money has been paid by Her Majesty's Government to bodies in Afghanistan tasked with rebuilding that country; what percentage of money pledged to Afghanistan was promised to non-governmental organisations; and what percentage of money pledged to NGOs in the rebuilding of Afghanistan has been paid. [77942]

Clare Short: At the international donor conference in Tokyo in January 2002, the UK Government pledged £200 million of Department for International Development (DFID) resources over five years for humanitarian and reconstruction needs in Afghanistan. This was in addition to the approximately £60 million DFID had provided to address the immediate humanitarian need since October 2001. For the current

financial year DFID have allocated £65 million for Afghanistan, of which just over half has been disbursed. Of this £7.7 million has been allocated directly to NGOs, of which over 95 per cent. has been disbursed. My Department have made significant contributions towards UN humanitarian appeals, which are putting into place important foundations for Afghanistan's longer term reconstruction. £10 million has been paid into the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund to help meet the costs of the Afghanistan Transitional Authority.

PRIME MINISTER

Appointments

Mr. Donaldson: To ask the Prime Minister what plans there are for the Independent Appointments Commission to make further appointments of non-party political peers to the House of Lords. [80674]

The Prime Minister: The make-up of the House of Lords is kept constantly under review.

Correspondence

Mr. Allen: To ask the Prime Minister if he will place in the Library a table of his Departments' performance in replying to Members' correspondence. [80525]

The Prime Minister: The Cabinet Office, on an annual basis, publishes a report to Parliament on the volume of Members' correspondence received by Departments. The report for 2001 was published on Friday 24 May 2002, *Official Report*, column 674W. Copies of previous reports are available in the Library of the House. The report for 2002 will be published as soon as possible after the end of the current calendar year.

For information about the handling of correspondence within my own office, I refer my honourable Friend to my reply to the hon. Member for Sutton and Cheam (Mr. Burstow) on 7 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 444W.

Gibraltar

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the result of the referendum in Gibraltar. [80814]

The Prime Minister: We have always been clear, as I reaffirmed to the House on 6 November, that no deal will be imposed on the people of Gibraltar against their will. Our aim remains a better future for Gibraltar and resolution of the problems it faces. We will continue our dialogue with Spain and Gibraltar to this end.

Gifts

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Prime Minister what the ceiling is on the value of gifts which may be retained by Ministers when they are undertaking official visits. [80817]

The Prime Minister: Guidance on the acceptance of gifts is set out in paragraphs 136 to 138 of the Ministerial Code.

Leak Inquiries

Mr. Allen: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make it his practice to decide whether to comment on leak inquiries on a case-by-case basis. [80521]

The Prime Minister: No. In order to safeguard security and investigative arrangements, it has been the practice of successive governments not to comment on the conduct and outcome of leak inquiries.

Legal Advice

Mr. Allen: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make it his policy to put the legal advice given to Government in the Library, when appropriate. [80523]

The Prime Minister: There is a longstanding convention, followed by successive Governments and reflected in the ministerial code, that legal advice to the Government remains confidential. This enables Government to obtain frank and full legal advice in confidence, as everyone else can.

Ministerial Code

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Prime Minister whether he has amended paragraph 27 of the Ministerial Code relating to current announcements. [80644]

The Prime Minister: The Government's position on paragraph 27 of the Ministerial Code remains as set out in its response to the second report of the Public Administration Select Committee on the Ministerial Code (HC 439).

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Prime Minister what guidance he gives to Ministers who are in breach of the Ministerial Code relating to public announcements. [80645]

The Prime Minister: As section 1 of the Ministerial Code makes clear, Ministers are accountable to Parliament for their decisions and action. This includes the content and timing of individual announcements.

Ministerial Travel

Mr. Tyrie: To ask the Prime Minister what the total cost to the Government was of chartering *(a)* RAF and *(b)* civil aircraft for ministerial travel between 31 March 2001 and 31 March 2002. [80527]

The Prime Minister: The overall cost of Ministers' visits overseas and the annual list of overseas visits by Cabinet Ministers costing more than £500 for the period 1 April 2001 to 31 March 2002 were published on 24 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 1373W. The list provides details of the occasions in which RAF aircraft or private charter flights were used and the cost.

Parliamentary Questions

Mr. Allen: To ask the Prime Minister (1) if he will list the areas of written questioning on which he will not answer written questions in this session; [80522]

(2) if he will undertake a review of the areas of written questions which his Departments do not provide answers to. [80524]

The Prime Minister: Ministers' responsibilities are set out in the "List of Ministerial Responsibilities". Answers to Parliamentary Questions are provided in accordance with the Ministerial Code and the Civil Service Code.

Press Briefings

Mr. Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Prime Minister what embargos are in place relating to press notices concerning legislation to be proposed in the Queen's Speech; and if he will make a statement on his policy relating to briefing the press, with special reference to the Extradition Bill. [80643]

The Prime Minister: Background notes relating to the Queen's Speech are issued to parliamentary journalists at 0930 hours on the day of the speech. These notes are strictly embargoed until after Her Majesty the Queen has completed her Speech. This has been the practice of this Government and previous Administrations. No background note was issued in relation to the Extradition Bill, which did not appear in the Queen's Speech, and the Home Office held a briefing for journalists on the day the Bill was published.

Royal Prerogative

Mr. Allen: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the powers which he may exercise under the Royal Prerogative; and if he will make it his policy to *(a)* keep a list of his use of Royal Prerogative powers and *(b)* place it in the Library each year. [80520]

The Prime Minister: Records are not kept of the individual occasions on which powers under the Royal Prerogative are exercised, nor could it be practicable to do so.

Security Services

Mr. Allen: To ask the Prime Minister if he will publish the full accounts of the Security Services. [80519]

The Prime Minister: No. It is long-standing Government policy not to comment on details of intelligence and security matters. While the overall budget of the Security and Intelligence Agencies is made public in the Single Intelligence Account, the budgets of the individual agencies are not. The Intelligence and Security Committee scrutinises the detail of each agency's finances on Parliament's behalf.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Former Icelandic Water Trawlermen

Shona McIsaac: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many refused claims for compensation for former Icelandic water trawlermen are awaiting *(a)* first appeal and *(b)* a decision by the independent adjudicator. [80118]

Nigel Griffiths: At present there are 248 claims awaiting a decision on initial queries against the decision of the Watford Office. There are 71 appeals awaiting the decision of the Independent Adjudicator.

Shona McIsaac: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many appeals from former Icelandic water trawlermen have been dealt with by the independent adjudicator. [80119]

Nigel Griffiths: 366 appeals have been dealt with by the Independent Adjudicator.

Shona McIsaac: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many refused claims for compensation for former Icelandic water trawlermen have been overturned *(a)* at first appeal and *(b)* by the independent adjudicator. [80121]

Nigel Griffiths: 414 queries against the decision of the Watford office have been allowed. Of these, 92 were because of the change in the rules concerning fishing after 1979. 36 appeals have been allowed by the Independent Adjudicator, a number of them because of the change in the scheme rules after the Watford Office considered them.

TRANSPORT

Air Transport Consultation

Mr. John Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if the ultimate recommendation for the future of Birmingham airport will be drawn from and confined to the three options set out in the Government's consultation document. [81072]

Mr. Jamieson: We are consulting on a range of development options throughout the midlands, including at Birmingham international airport. No decisions have yet been taken and no final view will be taken on any option until we have taken full account of the consultation responses.

The purpose of a proper consultation is to seek views from a wide range of stakeholders and, as part of their formal responses, different options may be brought forward. We would need to consider and assess the merits of any other option as a necessary part of the consultation process.

Mr. John Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when answers will be given to written inquiries from members of the public regarding the air transport consultation process with particular reference to questions submitted to him in writing during the first week of October. [81073]

Mr. Jamieson: To date, we have received over 25,000 letters from the public on the midlands options alone. My officials are cataloguing each letter and drafting responses as quickly as practicable.

Buses

Mr Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the average age is of the UK bus fleet. [81030]

Mr. Spellar: The average age of the bus and coach fleet in Great Britain was 8.4 years in June 2002. The age profile of the GB fleet is published in the Department's quarterly Transport statistics bulletin bus quality indicators, copies of which are available in the Libraries of the House.

Cyclists and Pedestrians

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many people have received hospital treatment in each of the last five years following collisions between cyclists and pedestrians. [80393]

Mr. Jamieson: Information is not available on the number of people who have received hospital treatment as a result of road accidents. The Department's statistics of road casualties identifies those who were "seriously injured"—which includes those who were detained in hospital as an in-patient, as well as those who suffered a range of other injuries whether or not they were detained in hospital.

The number of people seriously injured in collisions between cyclists and pedestrians in Great Britain for each of the last five years is listed in the following table:

Year	*Seriously injured*
2001	57
2000	65
1999	75
1998	85
1997	90

Disabled People (Parking)

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) when the review of the disabled persons' parking card scheme will be completed; and if he will make a statement; [80762]

(2) if he will publish the response and recommendations of the Disabled Persons' Transport Advisory Committee to the Government's review of the disabled persons' parking card scheme. [80763]

Mr. Jamieson: We are currently finalising our response to the DPTAC recommendations. We aim to make a statement to the House shortly.

Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency

Clive Efford: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what proportion of parking enforcement notices were not paid due to inaccuracy of information provided by the DVLA in each of the last five years. [80806]

Mr. Jamieson: The information requested is held neither centrally nor by local government.

London Traffic

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many miles of road in London have been closed to through traffic since 1997. [81029]

Mr. Spellar: Roads are closed to traffic, either temporarily or permanently, for a variety of reasons by the police or the local traffic authorities. There is no central record of such closures.

Road Safety Improvements

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many miles of urban road have been given safety improvements since 1997. [81032]

Mr. Spellar: The information requested is not held centrally.

Strategic Rail Authority

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what review of the Strategic Rail Authority his Department has carried out which *(a)* was required under the terms of the Transport Act 2000 and *(b)* has been required by any subsequent changes to legislation. [81743]

Mr. Jamieson: None. It has been normal practice for an executive non-departmental public body to be reviewed every five years. The SRA assumed its full powers on 1 February 2001.

Train Safety Incidents

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list *(a)* the location and *(b)* the number of major train safety incidents in each year since 1992. [81006]

Mr. Jamieson: The Health and Safety Executive have provided the following list of major railway accidents since 1992. A major accident has been defined as those where either the Health and Safety Commission directed the Health and Safety Executive to produce a special report or where the Commission (with the consent of the Secretary of State) directed a public inquiry.

Date	*Location*
15 October 1994	Cowden
31 January 1995	Ais Gill
8 March 1990	Rickerscote
8 August 1996	Watford Junction
4 February 1997	Bexley
19 September 1997	Southall
5 October 1999	Ladbroke Grove
17 October 2000	Hatfield
28 February 2001	Great Heck
10 May 2002	Potters Bar

Comprehensive railway safety data and analysis can also be found in the Chief Inspector of Railways Annual Reports on Railway Safety, copies of which are available in the Libraries of the House.

TREASURY

Annuities

Phil Sawford: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps the Government has taken to ensure that consumers who are considering buying an annuity have clear information about all the options available to them. [80420]

Ruth Kelly: Since 1 September annuity firms have been required, by Financial Services Authority (FSA) rules, to draw to the attention of their customers their right to exercise the "open market option", that is to say to shop around among annuity providers.

The FSA has at the same time introduced a fact sheet for distribution by firms that explains the importance of choosing the right type of annuity and shopping around for good value, and provides help with exercising those choices.

This fact sheet also draws attention to other FSA fact sheets and guides for those approaching retirement and contemplating the purchase of an annuity.

Equitable Life

Sir Michael Spicer: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he expects to publish the Penrose report into Equitable Life. [80925]

Ruth Kelly: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave to the hon. Member for Colchester (Mr. Russell) on 15 October 2002, *Official Report*, column 608W.

Musical Instruments

Bob Russell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much he estimates will be raised in the current financial year from the levying of value-added tax on musical instruments. [80756]

John Healey: The lack of reliable data means it is not possible to estimate accurately the revenue from the levying of VAT on musical instruments.

CABINET OFFICE

Civil Service Pensions

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what information was given to retired civil servants prior to the transfer of their pension administration to the private firm Capita; and how many complaints have been received about *(a)* the change and *(b)* the manner in which the change was effected. [80797]

Mr. Alexander: Civil Service pensions have been paid through the private sector since the former Paymaster Agency was privatised in April 1997. The contract with Paymaster (1836) Ltd. expired on 30 September 2002 and, following a competitive procurement process, a new contract was awarded to Capita Hartshead.

As part of the procurement process, Cabinet Office consulted the Civil Service Pensioners' Alliance, the Civil Service Retirement Fellowship and the Council of Civil Service Unions. Cabinet Office also consulted pensioners at local branch meetings of the Alliance and the Fellowship. As a result of feedback from pensioners' groups and others, Cabinet Office was able to include a number of improvements in the new contract as well as tighten the performance standards.

All pensioners were advised of the change before Capita Hartshead paid their first instalment of pension. Letters to pensioners explained that:

Cabinet Office had appointed Capita Hartshead to pay their pensions;

they would get the same amount of pension on the same day of the month as before;

their pensions would continue to be paid from public funds;

Cabinet Office continue to be the managers of the Civil Service pension schemes; and

Capital Hartshead abide by the Data abide by the Data Protection Act.

The letters were sent to the 550,000 pensioners in batches from 20 September, as soon as the live data, with all the details required, was available for use by Capita Hartshead. It would have been premature to make an announcement before data had transferred successfully from Paymaster, acceptance testing had been completed and a Permit to Operate issued. If these processes had not been completed successfully, pension payments would continue to have been made by Paymaster at least in the short-term.

Cabinet Office has received 27 inquiries from pensioners about the change of provider, of which nine were complaints about the manner in which the change was effected.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

Non-stipendiary Ministers

35. **David Taylor:** To ask the hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners, what assessment the Church Commissioners have made of the need for new ordained non-stipendiary ministers to succeed all ministers who are likely to retire in the next 10 years. [81529]

Mr. Bell: No assessment has been made within those parameters, nor is there an express strategy for attracting NSMs. However, there continues to be an expansion in the number of ordained local ministry schemes, and considerable effort is being devoted to increasing vocations generally to all types of licensed ministry.

Clergy Pensions

40. **Mr. Clifton-Brown:** To ask the hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners, if he will make a statement on the level of pensions of clergy. [81536]

Mr. Bell: Clergy in office receive a stipend and are housed. When they retire, they have to meet the costs of their own housing, but they receive a pension from the state as well as that provided by the Church's clergy pension scheme. The basis for determining the benefits provided by the latter—a lump sum at retirement plus a pension—was designed to take into account all of these factors. The full service pension is currently £10,693 per annum and the retirement lump sum is £32,079.

House of Lords Attendance Costs

41. **Mr. Bryant:** To ask the hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners, how much bishops' attendance in the House of Lords has cost the Church Commissioners each year since 1997. [81537]

Mr. Bell: Bishops claim reimbursement of their costs in respect of attendance at the House of Lords directly from that body. There is no cost to the Church Commissioners.

VAT (Repairs and Maintenance)

Huw Irranca-Davies: To ask the hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners, if he will make a statement on discussions with European partners on obtaining a reduced rate of value added tax on repairs and maintenance of church buildings. [81527]

Mr. Bell: The Churches Main Committee will be represented on the delegation I am leading to Brussels. The committee has made a submission to the European Commission urging that the rate of VAT on the repair and maintenance of listed places of worship be reduced to 5 per cent. I welcome the Chancellor of the Exchequer's indications of support from the UK Government for this case and the churches have discussed their submission with HM Treasury who I understand are preparing the Government's own representations on this matter.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Domestic Violence

Norman Lamb: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister, what research has been carried out by his Department into the impact of dispersal and settlement patterns on the cost of providing services in rural areas as part of the local government formula grant review. [80931]

Mr. Raynsford: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to my honourable friend the Member for Brigg and Goole (Mr. Cawsey) on 4 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 49–50W.

Emergency Fire Cover (Bedford)

Mr. Edward Davey: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many Bedford self-propelled pumps were available for emergency fire cover in each year since 1972. [81698]

Mr. Raynsford: Information about the period 1972 to 1990 is not held centrally and could only be provided at disproportionate cost. The current arrangements for an emergency stockpile of vehicles were started in 1991 when the vehicles were concentrated at Marchington. At that time there were 1037 useable vehicles for England and Wales. An additional 116 vehicles were added in 1994 from Scotland. There are currently 1027 vehicles including the 116 for Scotland.

Exchange Flags, Liverpool

Mrs. Ellman: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) what arrangements he has entered into with the Walton Group to ensure that the agreement to recover Government grant in respect of Exchange Flags, Liverpool, will be implemented in full; [81098]

(2) whether the out of court settlement with the Walton Group in relation to Exchange Flags, Liverpool, included the payment of interest charges; and if he will make a statement; [81097]

(3) if he will ensure that the monies to be recovered from the Walton Group in respect of Exchange Flags, Liverpool, are invested in Liverpool City Centre. [81099]

Mr. McNulty: English Partnerships, acting as agent for the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, has secured a first legal charge over the Exchange Buildings, which is owned by the Walton Group. In the event that the Walton Group do not honour its commitment, EP will enforce the security.

The City Grant agreement made no provision for an automatic legal entitlement to interest. We believe that the settlement represents a satisfactory outcome, which avoided further legal costs. There is however, provision within the agreed settlement terms for interest to accrue under certain circumstances.

I am conscious that the original City Grant was provided to assist the regeneration of Liverpool City Centre. I am therefore looking at how this original intention can be best fulfilled.

Homelessness

Linda Perham: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what assessment he has made of the emotional strain on families of long-term homelessness. [80530]

Mrs. Roche: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister recognises that the experience of homelessness can place families under emotional strain, particularly when they are placed in bed and breakfast hotels. This is why we are investing £125 million this year to tackle homelessness more effectively. This includes helping local authorities develop new approaches that tackle the problems that are making and keeping them homeless.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has also commissioned research which will explore the range and type of support needs of homeless families and approaches to meeting these support needs. We are expecting to publish the research in late summer 2003.

Lynne Jones: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what additional housing has been funded to enable local authorities to meet their additional responsibilities under the Homelessness Act 2002. [80732]

Mrs. Roche: The Homelessness Act places new duties on local authorities and, together with the Priority Need Order, extends the priority groups whom local authorities have a statutory duty to help. Affordable housing is an important part in tackling homelessness that is why we have doubled the resources available for housing since 1997 and will be increasing investment by a further 1.4 billion over the next three years. However, as we made clear in 'More than a roof', the provision of affordable housing will not solve homelessness on its own.

Investment of 125 million this year, together with changes to Housing Benefit subsidies, is helping local authorities to meet this commitment. It will also support new approaches that help people tackle the problems that are making and keeping
them homeless.

Local Government Finance

Norman Lamb: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what account he has taken of the extra cost of providing services in rural areas in the local government formula grant review. [80929]

Mr. Raynsford: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to my honourable friend the Member for Brigg and Goole (Mr. Cawsey) on 4 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 49W.

Mr. Leigh: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what account he has taken of the cost of providing services in rural areas in the local government formula grant review. [80389]

Mr. Raynsford: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to my honourable friend the Member for Brigg and Goole (Mr. Cawsey) on 4 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 49W.

Mr. Leigh: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what assessment he has made of rural deprivation in the local government formula grant review. [80390]

Mr. Raynsford: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to my honourable friend the Member for Brigg and Goole (Mr. Cawsey) on 4 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 52W.

Mr. Leigh: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what impact changes in the local government formula grant will have on public services in West Lincolnshire. [80391]

Mr. Raynsford: We will announce the new system for distributing formula grant, including detailed grant allocations for individual authorities, at the time of the provisional local government finance settlement which we expect to be around the start of December. Once the Government has allocated its grant, decisions about budgets and services are primarily for local councils to make. However, we have already guaranteed that no authority will face a cut in grant next year on a like for like basis, and we hope to do better than that when we announce the actual floors and ceilings scheme as part of the provisional settlement.

Mr. Leigh: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what research was done by his Department into the impact of dispersal and settlement patterns on the cost of providing services in rural areas as part of the local government formula grant review. [80392]

Mr. Raynsford: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to my honourable friend the Member for Brigg and Goole (Mr. Cawsey) on 4 November 2002, *Official Report*, columns 49–50W.

Norman Lamb: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister, what assessment he has made of rural deprivation in the local government formula grant review. [80930]

Mr. Raynsford: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to my honourable friend the Member for Brigg and Goole (Mr. Cawsey) on 4 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 52W.

Neighbourhood Renewal

Mr. Edward Davey: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister, what the estimated *(a)* date, *(b)* cost to his Department and *(c)* cost to other Government bodies is of the incorporation of the neighbourhood wardens and street wardens into a new Neighbourhood Renewal Unit funding channel. [81703]

Mrs. Roche: The incorporation of the neighbourhood and street wardens into a new Neighbourhood Renewal funding stream is already under way. There will be no cost to the office of the Deputy Prime Minister or other Government departments. Indeed, a single wardens funding stream should help to streamline and simplify arrangements both for grant recipients and those administering the programmes.

Prisoners (Housing Resettlement)

Lynne Jones: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister, when he will be responding to the Social Exclusion Unit's recommendations on prisoners' housing resettlement needs in their report on reducing re-offending by ex-prisoners. [81041]

Mrs. Roche: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given to my right hon. Friend the Member for Manchester, Withington (Mr. Bradley) on 24 October 2002, *Official Report*, column 495W.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is awaiting the production of the Reducing Re-Offending Action Plan. It will work closely to influence cross-cutting solutions to impact on prisoners' housing resettlement needs before and after release.

EDUCATION

Class Sizes

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much was spent through the Standards Fund in 2001–02 by each local education authority on class size reduction. [81083]

Mr. Miliband: In 2001–02 just over £156 million revenue and £23 million capital grant was allocated to local education authorities, to reduce infant class sizes for five, six and seven-year-olds to 30 or fewer.

The following table sets out how much grant was allocated to each local education authority.

Capital and Revenue Allocations 2001–02

£

LEA name	*2001 (FY01–02) Capital*	*2001 (FY01–02) Revenue*
Barking and Dagenham	0	185,526
Barnet	0	146,250
Barnsley	11,568	911,262
Bath and North East Somerset	284,818	349,563
Bedfordshire	372,766	1,815,474
Bexley	10,718	516,693
Birmingham	0	1,266,912
Blackburn and Darwen	154,347	803,038
Blackpool	112,564	392,902
Bolton	67,000	1,158,745
Bournemouth	1,600,491	380,375
Bracknell Forest	60,480	361,463
Bradford	0	2,355,563
Brent	0	126,000
Brighton and Hove	0	752,033
Bristol	0	851,063
Bromley	0	990,000
Buckinghamshire	845,898	2,263,231
Bury	0	1,286,688
Calderdale	2,459	980,476
Cambridgeshire	23,155	1,886,827

Capital and Revenue Allocations 2001–02

£

LEA name	2001 (FY01–02) Capital	2001 (FY01–02) Revenue
Camden	0	78,667
Cheshire	224,677	2,407,878
City of London	0	0
Cornwall	0	1,977,256
Coventry	776	1,262,035
Croydon	0	324,212
Cumbria	72,848	1,584,188
Darlington	37,027	433,500
Derby, City of	0	1,163,438
Derbyshire	2,746,361	3,517,617
Devon	155,212	2,625,967
Doncaster	148,358	907,103
Dorset	417,995	1,836,945
Dudley	0	509,293
Durham	0	2,550,014
Baling	496,959	716,211
East Riding of Yorkshire	160,000	1,626,258
East Sussex	121,000	1,457,630
Enfield	9,251	916,206
Essex	156,051	3,337,250
Gateshead	0	237,153
Gloucestershire	269,514	2,467,212
Greenwich	0	186,667
Hackney	0	217,000
Halton	0	664,488
Hammersmith and Fulham	0	46,667
Hampshire	320,773	3,596,433
Haringey	0	438,511
Harrow	0	297,000
Hartlepool	0	231,729
Havering	143,160	559,572
Herefordshire	90,478	586,075
Hertfordshire	0	3,298,000
Hillingdon	0	672,162
Hounslow	0	355,500
Isle of Wight	16,787	384,632
Isles of Scilly	0	0
Islington	0	0
Kensington and Chelsea	0	0
Kent	1,133,432	2,822,425
Kingston upon Hull	0	673,625
Kingston upon Thames	1,459,978	971,325
Kirklees	167,574	1,960,159
Knowsley	0	471,750
Lambeth	0	135,333
Lancashire	361,887	4,753,165
Leeds	0	2,998,906
Leicester City	124,000	773,743
Leicestershire	522,032	2,481,575
Lewisham	0	311,918
Lincolnshire	1,865,542	2,115,816
Liverpool	85,000	611,573
Luton	1,987	650,173
Manchester	0	1,645,352
Medway	0	655,853
Merton	482,128	862,441
Middlesbrough	0	285,459
Milton Keynes	0	488,620
Newcastle upon Tyne	1,000	932,510
Newham	0	361,667
Norfolk	552,587	3,324,266
North East Lincolnshire	37,321	646,908
North Lincolnshire	0	807,883
North Somerset	155,587	480,253
North Tyneside	0	523,833
North Yorkshire	95,000	2,380,694
Northamptonshire	441,345	2,077,400
Northumberland	11,275	1,185,963
Nottingham City	0	732,510
Nottinghamshire	181,250	3,471,302
Oldham	22,373	1,042,829
Oxfordshire	338,658	1,406,290
Peterborough	0	640,120
Plymouth	0	833,071

Capital and Revenue Allocations 2001–02

£

LEA name	2001 (FY01–02) Capital	2001 (FY01–02) Revenue
Poole	34,514	381,438
Portsmouth	351,000	461,853
Reading	4,900	277,100
Redbridge	85,000	565,598
Redcar and Cleveland	39,146	560,628
Richmond Upon Thames	769,280	384,750
Rochdale	0	1,160,250
Rotherham	85,050	860,625
Rutland	78,568	157,250
Salford	0	977,499
Sandwell	0	1,159,622
Sefton	24,924	1,156,452
Sheffield	114,000	1,055,096
Shropshire	4,000	1,039,816
Slough	0	259,268
Solihull	3,750	942,163
Somerset	283,786	2,075,063
South Gloucestershire	122,457	1,297,950
South Tyneside	2,300	497,250
Southampton	0	417,461
Southend on Sea	0	414,375
Southwark	315,875	279,472
St. Helens	91,393	541,875
Staffordshire	183,800	2,672,217
Stockport	6,800	1,355,407
Stockton on Tees	0	799,850
Stoke on Trent	0	1,023,721
Suffolk	261,000	819,328
Sunderland	0	367,625
Surrey	432,794	2,523,980
Sutton	0	618,750
Swindon	87,950	806,650
Tameside	100,708	1,087,696
Telford and Wrekin	0	680,000
Thurrock	0	251,596
Torbay	352,506	353,813
Tower Hamlets	0	0
Trafford	68,030	590,750
Wakefield	64,326	1,444,546
Walsall	0	639,625
Waltham Forest	190,000	176,759
Wandsworth	0	305,667
Warrington	264,000	699,125
Warwickshire	143,685	2,151,704
West Berkshire	235,813	522,622
West Sussex	27,662	1,406,750
Westminster	0	16,333
Wigan	2,429	1,440,750
Wiltshire	4,781	1,890,846
Windsor and Maidenhead	129,249	506,263
Wirral	393,000	726,028
Wokingham	484,500	473,317
Wolverhampton	107,000	764,575
Worcestershire	132,500	1,731,457
York	0	621,562
Total England	23,255,924	156,159,421

Comprehensive Spending Reviews

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will make a statement on the role of comprehensive spending reviews in enabling local education authorities and others to plan expenditure over the longer term. [81082]

Mr. Miliband: The spending review 2002 set out the resources that the Government would be making available for education over the three years 2003–04 to 2005–06. The allocation of general funding to each local

education authority, taking account of the increases from SR2002, and the new local authority funding system, will be announced by early December. Those allocations will set a trend for local education authorities for the next three years, and we will work with local education authorities to encourage them to deliver three-year budgets for their schools. These will be firm budgets for 2003–04, but will be indicative for 2004–05 and 2005–06 because of the impact of changes in pupil numbers and other data.

Exam Grades

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will list, by subject, the adjustments made by the Examination Boards' accountable officers to the grade boundaries recommended by principal examiners in *(a)* 2001 and *(b)* each preceding year for which the information is available. [80586]

Mr. Miliband: The Government do not hold the information requested. This is a matter for the awarding bodies.

School Standards Grant

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills which schools have moved between bands for the purposes of School Standards Grant in each of the last two years as a result of a change in pupil numbers, showing in each case the increase or decrease in the school budget and the date on which the change took effect. [81087]

Mr. Miliband: Local education authorities (LEAs) are responsible for paying School Standards Grant (SSG) to individual schools on the basis of a central grant received from the Department. The format of LEAs' financial returns would mean that providing the required information would incur disproportionate cost.

Teaching Assistants

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) if he plans to limit the number of hours per week that a pupil should be *(a)* taught and *(b)* supervised by a teaching assistant; [81081]

(2) what plans he has to limit the subjects which can be taught by advanced teaching assistants. [81314]

Mr. Miliband: The Government's proposals on developing the role of support staff, which were published for consultation in October, include proposals which would for the first time provide a regulatory framework to underpin the involvement of support staff in the teaching and learning process. These are based on the key principles that qualified teachers must have overall responsibility for effective teaching and learning, and that there must always be a clear system of leadership and supervision by a qualified teacher to ensure high standards of teaching and learning. Provided those conditions are met, it is proposed that determining what should be delegated should be primarily a matter for the professional judgment of headteachers and qualified teachers rather than for rigid national demarcation. The draft Education (Teaching Work and Registration) (England) Regulations 2002 do not include proposed limits on the hours or subjects that a pupil should be either taught or supervised by a teaching assistant. The draft regulations provide that teaching assistants may only undertake a list of "specified teaching work" under a system of supervision determined by a qualified teacher using his or her professional judgment. Qualified teachers will remain responsible and accountable for the quality of teaching and learning in their classrooms.

Technology Colleges Trust

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans he has to ensure that the Technology Colleges Trust has the resources to support the proposed expansion of the specialist schools programme. [81078]

Mr. Miliband: The Department provides annual grant-in-aid to the Technology Colleges Trust to support the specialist schools programme. As in the past, we will consider the level of resources required for this in the context of the expansion of the specialist schools programme.

Trainee Teachers

Mr Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what recent assessment he has made of progress toward his Department's targets for the recruitment of trainee teachers in 2002, broken down by subject. [81076]

Mr. Miliband: Provisional figures published today by the Teacher Training Agency show that 31,261 people have been recruited to courses of initial teacher training in England in 2002–03, 2,067 more than in 2001–02. This third successive annual rise in recruitment vindicates the Government's decision, announced last December, to make 1,900 more training places available this year than in 2001–02.

The table shows numbers of trainees recruited as a percentage of the total number of training places available by phase and subject. Figures do not include the 1,904 new entrants to the Graduate Teacher Programme so far this year, of whom 935 are training in the priority subjects of mathematics, science, modern languages, technology and English.

2002–03

	ITT recruitment	*ITT places*	*ITT recruitment as percentage of ITT places*
Primary	14,447	14,000	103
Secondary			
Mathematics	1,681	1,940	87
English & Drama	2,475	2,350	105
Science	2,648	2,850	93
Modern Foreign Languages	1,733	2,050	85
Total Technology	2,401	2,500	96
History	985	950	104
Geography	1,028	1,100	93
Physical Education	1,324	1,200	110
Art	880	850	104
Music	608	700	87
Religious Education	576	700	82
Citizenship	185	200	93

2002–03

	ITT recruitment	*ITT places*	*ITT recruitment as percentage of ITT places*
Other	174	300	58
Secondary Reserve		100	
Secondary Total[3]	16,698	17,790	94
Total	31,145	31,790	98
Fast Track	116		
Grand Total	31,261	—	—

Source:
Teacher Training Agency ITT Trainee Numbers Census 2002 (Provisional).
Notes:
1. The recruitment figures by subject exclude the 116 entrants on the fast track teaching route, attending ITT in 2002–03 as part of the programme. Of these, 29 are train in primary, and 87 in secondary, (8 mathematics, 20 English, 22 science, 16 modern foreign languages, 1 technology, 13 history, 3 geography, 1 physical education, and 3 music).
2. The 2002–03 ITT target includes a margin of flexibility. The 100 places available under the margin of flexibility is used as a provision for the TTA to "vire" places between secondary subjects within certain parameters.
3. Other secondary subjects, includes classics, economics and other social sciences and other subjects.

ELECTORAL COMMISSION COMMITTEE

Local Elections (Turnout)

Simon Hughes: To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission what evaluation is being made of the difference between the turnout for local council elections during the last year *(a)* where there has been a directly elected mayor and *(b)* where there has not been a directly elected mayor. [81532]

Mr. Beith: The Electoral Commission monitors turnout at local elections in the UK. There have not yet been full council elections in any area in which a mayoral election has already taken place.

Postal Voting

Kevin Brennan: To ask the right hon. Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed, representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission what discussions he has had with the Electoral Commission on more active promotion of postal voting. [81535]

Mr. Beith: The Electoral Commission is actively engaged in work to raise public awareness of the availability of postal voting.

A key element of this programme is dedicated activity to promote postal voting across Great Britain in the spring of each year in which there are public elections. In support of this, the Commission will be producing new leaflets about postal voting by December this year, which will be distributed to Electoral Registration Officers and displayed in post offices across Great Britain prior to the elections planned for next spring.

Information about postal voting is also available from the Commission's website and the Commission published good practice advice to local authorities on local promotion of postal voting and other issues in its October 2002 report "Making an impact".

HEALTH

Mental Health Act 1983

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many representations he has received with regard to the reform of the Mental Health Act 1983 since the publication of the draft mental health Bill. [80483]

Jacqui Smith: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Vale of York (Miss Anne McIntosh) on 29 October 2002, *Official Report*, column 750W.

National Service Framework for Diabetes

Mr. David Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he expects to publish the national service framework for diabetes. [81480]

Mr. Lammy: We will be making an announcement on the publication of the national service framework delivery strategy for diabetes shortly and would hope to do so by way of a written ministerial statement. I shall make sure that my hon. Friend receives a copy.

Written Answers to Questions

Tuesday 19 November 2002

DEFENCE

Arctic Convoys (Medals)

Mr. Swire: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for what reason he has refused to allow veterans of World War II Arctic convoys to receive the Defence of the Soviet Arctic Region medal; and if he will reconsider the decision. [80897]

Dr. Moonie: Ministry of Defence has not refused veterans of the Second World War who participated in the convoys to Russia permission to wear the Defence of the Soviet Arctic Region medal. Any official approach from a foreign Government requesting permission to distribute foreign medals to British citizens would be the responsibility of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. In this case I am advised that the Russians have made no such request. However, if the Russian authorities ask for their Defence of the Soviet Arctic Region Medal to be officially recognised, the matter will be carefully deliberated, as are all similar requests from foreign governments.

D-day

Mr. Ivan Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans his Department has made to mark the 60th anniversary of D-day. [80896]

Dr. Moonie: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave on 31 October 2002, *Official Report*, column 881W, to the hon. Member for North Essex (Mr. Jenkin).

Information Display System (Royal Navy)

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what problems have been experienced with the Royal Navy's Joint Tactical Information Display System. [80822]

Dr. Moonie: Difficulties experienced on the Royal Navy's Joint Tactical Information Distribution System have concerned the complex integration activity inherent in such a programme. The programme is now proceeding satisfactorily on the basis of incremental capability delivery.

Military Personnel

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on how many occasions in the past year disciplinary action has been taken against military personnel accused of giving false evidence in criminal proceedings; what action was taken in each case. [80617]

Dr. Moonie: Two Service personnel have had action taken against them in the last year for perverting the course of public justice and received sentences of military detention.

National Service Veterans

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans the Government have to award medals to national service veterans; and if he will make a statement. [80411]

Dr. Moonie: None. It has never been the Government's policy to consider service in the armed forces as the sole justification for the institution of a medal.

Sue Doughty: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans the Government have to erect a national monument to conscripted National Servicemen; and if he will make a statement. [80412]

Dr. Moonie: None. In accordance with the long established policy of successive Governments, the cost of erecting war memorials or their subsequent maintenance is not met from public funds but from private donations or public subscription. National Servicemen will be included in the eligibility criteria for the Armed Forces Memorial which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Defence announced on 20 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 313W and 21 March 2002, *Official Report*, column 449W.

I understand that a plot of land at the National Memorial Arboretum in Staffordshire has been allocated for a private initiative to erect a memorial specifically for National Servicemen.

New Zealand Test Veterans

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representations Her Majesty's Government has made concerning the financial support provided by the New Zealand government to New Zealand test veterans to support research into the health impact on them of British nuclear tests. [81947]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence has made no representations concerning financial support provided by the New Zealand Government to New Zealand nuclear test veterans to support research into the health impact on them of British nuclear tests.

Nuclear Test Veterans

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent discussions his Department has had with organisations concerning nuclear test veterans. [80123]

Dr. Moonie: The chief executive of the Veterans Agency met with representatives of the British Nuclear Test Veterans Association on 19 December 2001.

Private Alison Croft

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the result has been of the investigation into the circumstances of the death of Private Alison Croft at Dalton Barracks in Abingdon, Oxfordshire on 2 October; at what time police were called; what steps were taken to secure evidence at the scene of the death;

what the conclusions were of their inquiry; what was the nature of the post mortem examination, by whom it was carried out; and what were the findings; at what time were relatives of the deceased notified; and what arrangements he has made for *(a)* an inquest and *(b)* a board of inquiry. [80649]

Dr. Moonie: Private Alison Croft died at Dalton Barracks, Abingdon, on 28 September 2002. The associated civilian police investigation is still ongoing. In light of this, it would be inappropriate to comment on the circumstances of the investigation at this time.

Her Majesty's Coroner is the appropriate authority to determine the arrangements for an inquest, not the Ministry of Defence, although the Department will aim to provide assistance where required. A determination has yet to be made as to whether a Board of Inquiry will be held.

Reservists

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has for regular reservists to receive the Golden Jubilee Medal. [80696]

Dr. Moonie: There are no plans to amend the qualifying criteria for the Queen's Golden Jubilee Medal to include those who had left the armed forces before 6 February 2002, regardless of whether they had a reserve liability or not.

Royal Irish Regiment

Mr. Donaldson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what the total combined strength of the Home Service Battalions of the Royal Irish Regiment had been for *(a)* part-time and *(b)* full-time soldiers in each year since its formation; [80661]

(2) how many *(a)* part-time and *(b)* full-time soldiers are enlisted with each of the Home Service Battalions of the Royal Irish Regiment. [80660]

Dr. Moonie: The Royal Irish Regiment was formed from the amalgamation of the Royal Irish Rangers and the Ulster Defence Regiment on 1 July 1992. The combined strength of the Home Service Battalions as at that date for each year since its formation is included in the table:

Year	*Full-time*	*Part-time*
1992	2,854	2,640
1993	2,831	2,611
1994	2,842	2,385
1995	2,876	2,197
1996	2,775	2,023
1997	2,614	1,974
1998	2,576	1,961
1999	2,257	1,866
2000	2,163	1,713
2001	2,019	1,603
2002	1,846	1,458

There are currently three Home Service Battalions of the Royal Irish Regiment in Northern Ireland. As at 1 October 2002, the number of part-time and full-time personnel, in each Home Service Battalion is set out in the table.

	Full-time	*Part-time*
2 R Irish	558	385
3 R Irish	697	573
4 R Irish	606	478

All figures do not include those R Irish employed at Headquarters and Depot R Irish.

Royal Naval Reserve (Chaplains)

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the future of the Chaplain's Branch of the Royal Naval Reserve. [81508]

Dr. Moonie: There is currently no Chaplains' Branch in the Royal Naval Reserve, it having been disestablished in the early nineties. However, a Chaplains' Branch is scheduled to be re-established as a Royal Naval Reserve branch and this will take effect from 1 January 2003. The Branch will have 18 members, who will be part of a Naval Home Command headquarters unit, trained and administered by the Director General Naval Chaplaincy Service. They will be appointed to Naval Bases and Shore Establishments, where they will be liable for duty should it be necessary for regular Naval Service Chaplains to be deployed operationally.

Service Applicants

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many people applied to join the *(a)* Army and *(b)* Naval Service and *(c)* Royal Air Force in each of the past five years; and how many of those were accepted. [80976]

Dr. Moonie: The number of people who applied for and joined the armed forces since 1 April 1998 are as follows:

	1998–99	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*	*2002–03*[1]
Naval Service					
Applications	14,858	14,805	14,694	13,975	7,097
Intake	4,770	4,950	4,620	5,013	2,470
Army					
Applications	41,389	42,498	33,332	38,929	20,655
Intake	16,267	16,480	14,410	14,782	8,670
RAF					
Applications	22,393	21,572	20,689	19,453	9,126
Intake	4,250	4,100	3,630	3,783	2,060

[1] Figures for 2002–03 show the position as at 30 September 2002.

TA Bounty

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the rationale is behind the target of 60 per cent. for members of the TA to achieve their bounty each year; and what the target was in each year since 1997. [81108]

Dr. Moonie: The Territorial Army does not set any targets for members to achieve bounty, and has never done so. The criteria for awarding a bounty are: completion of a 15-day period of continuous training; or, if authorised, a reduced camp of eight days. In addition, Independent TA personnel must undertake out camp training for 12 days (this is reduced to four days for Specialists) and achieve three passes in

individual Training Directives 1–5 (this is reduced to two passes for Specialists). Finally, all personnel must be awarded the COs Certificate of Efficiency in order to qualify for a bounty.

There is currently a Fit For Role target of 60 per cent. of the TA's strength. The rationale behind this target is based on the fact that the TA is at least 5 per cent undermanned; on average 25 per cent. of all TA are under recruit or Class 3 training at any one time; and up to 10 per cent. of members are unable to meet the training commitments for personal or business reasons. Between training years 1996–97 and 2001–02 the TA employed a Fit For Role target of 55 per cent. of strength. We expect that the TA will meet the target of 60 per cent. of this financial year.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Air Quality

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans her Department has to empower local authorities to provide mandatory air quality monitoring. [80501]

Alun Michael: Local authorities have a duty under Part IV of the Environment Act 1995 to review and assess the air quality in their areas and to declare air quality management areas, where it appears that any air quality objective is unlikely to be met on time. This usually involves some monitoring of key pollutants, but the amount of monitoring varies from one authority to another depending upon the scale of any local air pollution problems.

There are no plans to make air quality monitoring mandatory for all local authorities. This would be disproportionately expensive. Authorities may instead make use of air quality monitoring data from the national automatic monitoring network run by my Department. Where my Department feels that an authority, which has no monitoring of its own, should undertake some air quality monitoring in its area, we may issue directions to that local authority indicating that it must do so.

We introduced the Air Quality Supplementary Credit Approval Programme to support authorities capital costs. Since 1997, the Government have awarded over £20 million to assist authorities with expenditure on air quality monitoring equipment, dispersion modelling and emissions inventories.

Animal By-products

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what strategies her Department intends to implement to meet the targets under the draft EU regulation on animal by-products. [80509]

Mr. Morley: There are no targets under the EU animal by-products regulation, but we intend to introduce a statutory instrument to give effect to the requirements of the regulation following consultation with industry and interested parties.

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans her Department has to revise the Animal By-products Order to include the composting or biogas digestion of kitchen and catering wastes containing meat. [80510]

Mr. Morley: We will shortly be consulting on an amendment to the Animal By-products Order, which will permit the treatment in approved composting or biogas plants of catering waste which contains meat or which comes from premises on which meat is handled. Approved premises would need to comply with treatment standards and hygiene requirements in line with recommendations made by an independent risk assessment commissioned by DEFRA.

Animal Diseases (EU Finance)

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what her policy is on applying to the European Commission for a share of the financial package to fight BSE and other animal diseases in the EU in 2003; and if she will make a statement. [81715]

Mr. Morley: For 2003, the UK intended to apply to the European Commission with claims for funding for TB and Brucella for Northern Ireland and for TSE surveillance. These claims were not received by the Commission until after the 1 June 2002 deadline, and were judged to be ineligible.

Animal Movements

Lembit Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what action the Government will take against those who disregard 20-day restrictions on animal movements from 1 January 2003 by refusing to complete standard movement documents. [80549]

Mr. Morley: Responsibility for enforcement of the animal movements legislation falls to Local Authorities. It is for each such authority to determine the appropriate action to take in the event of a breach of the legislation. It is in the interests of the farming industry as a whole, and of the wider rural economy, that farmers should complete these movement documents correctly and observe the animal movement controls in force, so as to help prevent any repeat of last year's outbreak of foot and mouth disease.

Congestion Charging

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many car parking spaces are available to *(a)* employees of her Department and *(b)* visitors to her Department within the proposed central London road user charging zone. [81855]

Alun Michael: Within the proposed central London charging zone there are 16 car parking spaces available to employees of the Department, and nine car parking spaces available to visitors to the Department.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the policy is of her Department in relation to the reimbursement of central London road user charges incurred by its employees. [81835]

Alun Michael: All civil servants are responsible for payment of their own every day home to office travel costs. The introduction of a central London road user scheme will not affect this basic condition of service. We are currently considering our policy in relation to staff on official business who are required to drive their own or hire vehicles within the charging zone.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the estimated cost is to her Department of the Central London Road User Charging Scheme for *(a)* 17 February 2003 to 31 March 2003, and *(b)* 1 April 2003 to 31 March 2004. [81874]

Alun Michael: Any additional costs which might accrue to the Department as a result of the congestion charging scheme would be just one element within wider costs which have to be met from budgets for official travelling and other costs.

Correspondence

Tony Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, when she will reply to the letter of Mr. Williams of Cockermouth, a constituent, of 2 December 2001. [80879]

Alun Michael: Information on letters sent direct to the Department from members of the public is not collated centrally. Such letters are referred to the relevant Division within the Department on receipt for answer.

Countryside Agency

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she will announce the next five years funding for the Countryside Agency. [80743]

Alun Michael: I shall make a final decision on the Agency's resource allocation for 2003–04 shortly. I expect the allocation to be very near to £100 million, a considerable increase on this year's allocation of £92 million.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the different financial models she is considering for the future of the Countryside Agency. [80744]

Alun Michael: As I announced on 8 November a review of rural policy delivery arrangements will commence shortly, led by Lord Haskins. Its remit will encompass all aspects of the efficiency and effectiveness of the delivery arrangements, including those which are currently the responsibility of the Countryside Agency.

Emissions

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what emissions of *(a)* carbon monoxide, *(b)* hydrocarbons, *(c)* oxides of nitrogen and *(d)* particulates are generated by the average UK oil central heating domestic boiler. [81012]

Alun Michael: We estimate that in 2000 there were approximately 760,000 households using oil for central heating in the UK, burning a total of 2.25 million tonnes of oil annually. Emissions from individual boilers vary depending on the amount of use, and their efficiency and maintenance. However, we estimate that average annual emissions per boiler in 2000 were as follows:

Pollutant	*Average annual emissions per boiler*
Carbon Monoxide	0.49kg
Hydrocarbons[1]	1.3kg
Oxides of Nitrogen	6.5kg
Particles (PM10)	0.09kg

[1] Hydrocarbons includes volatile organic compounds and methane

Horticultural Research Institute

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what plans she has to transfer scientists from Wellesbourne back to HRI Efford; and if she will make a statement; [80826]

(2) if she will make a statement about the conclusions of the 2002 Quinquennial Review of the Horticultural Research Institute in so far as it affects the future of Efford. [80883]

Mr. Morley: The Quinquennial Review report on Horticulture Research International was published on 23 September for public consultation. This consultation period closed on 18 November, and we hope to be able to make a statement on the way forward shortly.

IT Security

Brian White: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps she has taken to review the security of the Department's IT system; and how many digital attacks there were on the Department's system in *(a)* October and *(b)* 2002. [80769]

Alun Michael: IT security in the Department is kept under continuous review.

The number of cases of digital attacks detected was *(a)* 34 in October and *(b)* 564 in 2002. These attacks were all stopped by our existing security measures.

Recruitment (Over-50s)

Mr. MacDougall: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many people employed in her Department are aged over 50. [81690]

Alun Michael: There are 1,570 people aged over 50 employed by the core Department.

Rural White Paper

Mr Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what plans she has to review the *(a)* policy and *(b)* delivery of the Rural White Paper; [80745]

(2) when the review of the Rural White Paper will be published. [80746]

Alun Michael: On 8 November, I announced that there would be a review of the Rural White Paper, to ensure that delivery is on track and to identify ways of accelerating delivery of the Rural White Paper's vision. The review will be completed by summer 2003 and the results will inform our decisions on future delivery of rural policy.

This work will be undertaken in parallel with the review of rural delivery mechanisms, led by Lord Haskins, and reporting to Ministers by summer 2003.

CABINET OFFICE

Better Regulation

40. **Mr. Steen:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how many business leaders he has met in the last six months to discuss the Government's better regulation agenda. [81363]

Mr. Alexander: In the normal course of my duties I attend many functions and events at which I meet many business people and we speak on a wide range of topics including the Government's better regulation agenda.

Information Systems

41. **Mr. Bryant:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how often he meets the Government's e-Envoy to review the progress towards compatibility of information systems across Government. [81364]

Mr. Alexander: I meet regularly with the e-Envoy to discuss and review all aspects of delivering the e-Government strategy, including the compatibility and interoperability of the various information systems across Government.

Public Services

42. **Fiona Mactaggart:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what actions he is taking to improve the delivery of public services. [81365]

Mr. Alexander: The Delivery Unit continues to work in partnership with Departments and offers support in meeting key objectives. Its role is to ensure that the Government achieve their delivery priorities across the key areas of public service.

Working closely with the Treasury, it will ensure that the Departments have in place effective delivery plans for their PSAs.

Sensitive Documents

43. **Dr. Julian Lewis:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what guidance he has given to Government departments to safeguard sensitive documents in their offices. [81366]

Mr. Alexander: Policy guidance on safeguarding sensitive documents is contained in the manual of protective security. The manual is produced by the Cabinet Office and distributed to all Government departments.

This guidance covers all aspects pf protective security, including physical, document, information security and personnel security.

Public Appointments (Women)

44. **Ms Dari Taylor:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office, what progress has been made by his Department in encouraging the number of women seeking public appointments. [81367]

Mr. Alexander: The Public Appointments Unit, in my Department, seeks to raise awareness of public appointments and actively encourages women to seek such appointments. It has participated in a national outreach campaign of regional seminars led by the Ministers for Women and organised by the Women and Equality Unit, to encourage more women to apply for national public appointments. These seminars have reached over 2,000 women from diverse backgrounds across the country.

PRESIDENT OF THE COUNCIL

Pre-legislative Scrutiny

Mr. Graham Allen: To ask the President of the Council if he will list for each Government Bill to be introduced this session the form of pre-legislative scrutiny to which it will be subject. [80640]

Mr. Robin Cook: The Queen's Speech indicated the Government's intention to submit a number of Bills for pre-legislative scrutiny this session. No decisions have been made as to the form of scrutiny to which they will be subjected.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Afghanistan

Mr. Ivan Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many ministerial visits have been made to Afghanistan since the fall of the Taliban regime. [80894]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Since the collapse of the Taliban, the following Ministers from Her Majesty's Government have visited Afghanistan (making a total of eight ministerial visits):

Prime Minister, the right hon. Tony Blair, 7 January 2002,
Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, the right hon. Jack Straw, 14–15 February 2002,
Secretary of State for Defence, the right hon. Geoffrey Hoon during a visit to the region from 4–7 February 2002 and from 1–4 July 2002,
Minister for the Armed Forces, the right hon. Adam Ingram, 3 April 2002, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Defence, Dr. Lewis Moonie, 20 June 2002,
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, Mike O'Brien, 12–15 October 2002,
Secretary of State for International Development, the right hon. Clare Short, 28–30 October 2002.

Avient Air

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions have taken place in the past two years between British Government officials in *(a)* Zimbabwe, *(b)* other African countries and *(c)* the UK and *(i)* Mr Andrew Smith and (ii) other representatives of Avient Air with regard to (A) sales of military equipment and (B) other matters. [81764]

Mr. Rammell: There has been no contact in the past two years, in either the UK or Zimbabwe, between Foreign Office officials and Andrew Smith or representatives of Avient Air regarding the sales of

military equipment. To identify contacts in other African countries on other matters could be done only at disproportionate cost.

Congestion Charging

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many car parking spaces are available to *(a)* employees of his Department and *(b)* visitors to his Department within the proposed central London road user charging zone. [81853]

Mr. Rammell: 75 car parking spaces are available to FCO staff. A further eight spaces are available for visitors.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the estimated cost is to his Department of the central London road user charging scheme for *(a)* 17 February 2003 to 31 March 2003, and 1 April 2003 to 31 March 2004. [81872]

Mr. Rammell: Any additional costs to this Department as a result of the congestion charging scheme will be just one element within wider costs which have to be met from budgets for official travelling and other costs.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the policy is of his Department in relation to the reimbursement of central London road user charges incurred by its employees. [81893]

Mr. Rammell: It is general departmental travel planning policy that staff should not use cars to commute to and from work. However, staff on official business who are required to drive their own vehicles, or hire vehicles, within the charging zone will be reimbursed.

Democratic Republic of Congo

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the activities of Andrew Smith and Avient Air as referred to in paragraph 55 of the UN Experts Panel report on the DRC. [81765]

Mr. Rammell: We have asked the UN for information regarding allegations made against British companies or UK nationals. We have yet to receive a response.

Departmental Staff (Over-50s)

Mr. MacDougall: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many people employed in his Department are aged over 50. [81691]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: There are 1,233 (21 per cent.) people over 50 employed by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

General Ratko Mladic

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what action has been taken with other Governments to bring to justice General Ratko Mladic at the International Court at The Hague. [81058]

Mr. Rammell: We are very concerned about the lack of full co-operation with the International Criminal Tribunal on the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) by the Yugoslav Government. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary raised this with President Kostunica during his visit to Belgrade on 6 November. We will continue to press hard for the apprehension and transfer of all those indicted by the ICTY, including Ratko Mladic.

Nepal

Mr. Sarwar: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the situation in Nepal. [80750]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: We remain extremely concerned about the conflict in Nepal, which has seen a continuing loss of life, a reduction in development and human rights abuses.

We support the Nepalese Government's efforts in combating the Maoist insurgency and we condemn the Maoist's brutal attacks on the Nepalese security forces and her civilians.

The political situation in Nepal remains fragile following the appointment of a caretaker government by the King of Nepal, but we have seen some positive progress by the new Government, including on issues such as anti-corruption measures and economic reform. While we acknowledge that the regrettable security situation has prevented the holding of elections, we believe that the preservation of the constitutional monarchy and multi-party democracy are crucial. It is important that free, fair and credible elections are held as soon as the security situation allows.

The UK will continue to provide support for Nepal for security development and peace-building. The UK hosted an international meeting in June, which concluded that an integrated strategy encompassing these strands was required to address the underlying causes of the conflict as well as immediately dealing with the insurgency. We are currently taking forward this strategy through the newly-formed International Support Group, which includes representatives from all the major donor countries and organisations in Kathmandu. I had the privilege to chair the first meeting during my trip to Nepal last month.

Our development programme in Nepal is £22 million this year, and has been restructured, in the light of the conflict, to emphasise the delivery of tangible benefits to poor and excluded groups. An additional £6.7 million has been made available this year through the Global Conflict Prevention Pool.

Peru

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he plans to make to the Peruvian Government concerning the imprisonment of the trade union activist Walter Cubas Baltazar. [80642]

Mr. Rammell: Our Embassy in Lima raised the matter with the Ministry of Justice in July. The Peruvian authorities have not yet decided on this case. Our Embassy will continue to monitor closely this and all

other similar cases. The FCO contributes to human rights work in Peru in areas such as Freedom of Information and the work of the Ombudsman.

Taiwan

Mr. Roy: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representation he has made to the Government of the People's Republic of China in relation to the siting of missiles in the Taiwan Straits. [80129]

Mr. Rammell: We have made no representations specifically about missiles. However, we attach great importance to the avoidance of conflict in the Taiwan Straits, which could be very destabilising for the whole of the region and beyond. We take the view that the Taiwan question should be settled peacefully through negotiation between the people on both sides of the Taiwan Straits. We are strongly opposed to the use of force. We take every suitable opportunity to convey our views to the Chinese Government.

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if his Department supports the proposal of the European Parliament that an EU trade office be opened in Taiwan; and if he will make a statement. [81037]

Mr. Rammell: We understand that preparations for the establishment of an appropriate EU trade representative office in Taiwan are already under way and we welcome this development.

Visas

Ms Oona King: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what arrangements are being put in place to deal with the increase in visa applications at *(a)* the British embassy in Addis Ababa and *(b)* other diplomatic missions in Africa. [80585]

Mr. Rammell: Visa applications worldwide for the UK are rising by 6.5 per cent. a year. We are modernising our process and procedures to tackle this. Earlier this year we introduced a number of streamlining measures in Addis Ababa and other parts of Africa. These measures are aimed at resolving applications more efficiently without compromising the quality of decision making. We have also agreed funding for two additional officers in the visa section at Addis Ababa.

Mr. Ancram: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make a statement on the daily banking operations of UK high commissions and embassies in relation to the granting of visas; which currencies are accepted; what basis is used for calculating local exchange rates; which national or international banking institutions are used to hold accounts; which companies conduct audits; and what differences there are to such practices in *(a)* Afghanistan, *(b)* Albania, *(c)* Algeria, *(d)* Angola, *(e)* Argentina, *(f)* Azerbaijan, *(g)* Bangladesh, *(h)* Benin, *(i)* Bosnia-Herzegovina, *(j)* Botswana, *(k)* Burma, *(l)* Cameroon, *(m)* Chile, *(n)* China, *(o)* Colombia, *(p)* Congo Republic, *(q)* Democratic Republic of Congo, *(r)* Ivory Coast, *(s)* Cuba, *(t)* Egypt, *(u)* Eritrea, *(v)* Ethiopia, *(w)* India, *(x)* Indonesia, *(y)* Iran, *(z)* Israel, (aa) Kazakhstan, (bb) Liberia, (cc) Libya, (dd) Macedonia, (ee) Malawi, (ff) Malaysia, (gg) Mexico, (hh) Mozambique, (ii) Nigeria, (jj) North Korea, (kk) Pakistan, (ll) Philippines, (mm) Romania, (nn) Russian Federation, (oo) Rwanda, (pp) Sierra Leone, (qq) South Africa, (rr) Sudan, (ss) Syria, (tt) Tanzania, (uu) Turkey, (vv) Uganda, (ww) United States, (xx) Venezuela, (yy) Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, (zz) Zambia, (aaa) Zimbabwe and (bbb) euro-zone countries. [81168]

Mr. Straw: Embassies and High Commissions are required to operate under the Consular Fees Regulations 1981 (Statutory Instrument 476 of 1981). This states that "fees shall be paid in currency circulating at the place of payment, except that a consular officer shall have discretion to accept, in lieu of such currency, a cheque, money order, or other means of effecting payment in terms of that currency. The rate of exchange for calculating the equivalent of fees in terms of a foreign currency shall be based upon the rate of exchange which is generally prevailing on the date, and at the place of payment, but which may be adjusted by the consular officer in such a manner and to such extent as he considers to be expedient in the interests of administrative efficiency".

The same rate of exchange is set for all posts in a country. The exchange rate used in euro-zone countries is set by the British Consulate General in Dusseldorf since the headquarters of the European Central Bank is based in Germany.

Visa and consular fees are deposited into posts' official bank accounts. The decision as to which bank is used is taken by each individual post.

All overseas posts' operations are liable to review from our own Ukvisas Reviews section, FCO's internal audit department and also to national audit office scrutiny.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Horticulture Review

David Burnside: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the completion date is for the Review of the Horticulture Sector; and what the timescale is for consultation by the agricultural industry. [80111]

Mr. Pearson: The Review of the Northern Ireland Horticulture Sector was commissioned earlier this year to identify strategic opportunities for the development of the sector and provide a Development Plan for the future of the industry. I am pleased to report that the review has now been finalised and it is expected that publication of the Consultants' Report will be announced within the next two weeks.

This is a wide-ranging review across all of the main sectors of horticulture and the views of industry stakeholders will be critically important in helping government determine future policy for the sector. For that reason it is intended to allow a 12 week period for consultation with due regard for the Christmas holiday period. The comments of those engaged in the industry will be most welcome and a detailed announcement on consultation arrangements will be made when the Report is published.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Basic Education

Mrs. Betty Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what support her Department is giving to basic education. [81167]

Clare Short: The Government are strongly committed to mobilising the international community to meet the education and gender equality targets within the Millennium Development Goals. We have fully achieved the goals in this area set in our current Public Service Agreement, but recognise that there is still a huge challenge in getting to the 2015 objectives.

Since 1997 we have committed £700 million to basic education and forecast support amounts to £1.3 billion over the next five years, either through education sector support or direct budget support. Of this, about £500 million will go to Africa and £800 million to Asia. These spending figures are forecasts, not targets or commitments, and depend on agreeing high quality programmes with our partners.

Congestion Charging

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many car parking spaces are available to *(a)* employees of her Department and *(b)* visitors to her Department within the proposed Central London Road User Charging Zone. [81856]

Clare Short: There are no car parking spaces generally available to either employees or visitors, within the proposed Central London Road User Charging Zone. The only spaces we have are for the three official cars, one disabled space, and one for the maintenance contractor vehicle.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what the policy is of her Department in relation to the reimbursement of Central London road user charges incurred by its employees. [81836]

Clare Short: Where Central London road user charges are necessarily incurred in the course of official business they will be reimbursed in the same way as any other legitimate expense. Charges will not be reimbursed where they form part of the cost of daily home to office travel.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what the estimated cost is to her Department of the Central London Road User Charging Scheme for *(a)* 17 February 2003 to 31 March 2003, and *(b)* 1 April 2003 to 31 March 2004. [81875]

Clare Short: The only direct costs that will be incurred by my Department are in respect of the three official vehicles. We estimate that the costs of the Central London Road User Charging Scheme for the period 17 February 2003 to 31 March 2003 to be around £400, and for the full financial year 1 April 2003 to 31 March 2004 to be around £3,000.

Environmental and Social Objectives

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what proposals the Department has to follow up the Johannesburg Summit on Sustainable Development with more environmental and social objectives. [81055]

Clare Short: The World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) placed poverty eradication at the heart of efforts to achieve Sustainable development. It integrated sustainability into the existing international agenda and added some important new targets, such as the target of halving the proportion of people without access to basic sanitation by 2015.

My Department does not have any proposals for more environmental and social objectives following WSSD. We are working to ensure that the international community delivers on the promises it made at the Doha meeting of the World Trade Organisation, the Monterrey Conference on Financing for Development and at Johannesburg. We are working for a round of trade negotiations focused on making the international trade system fairer to developing countries, and to ensure that the commitments made at Monterrey to increase the level and improve the effectiveness of official development assistance are delivered.

Gender Disparity

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what progress has been made in eliminating gender disparity in primary and secondary education in developing countries; and what her Department's strategy is for meeting targets related to this. [80554]

Clare Short: According to the recently published EFA Global Monitoring Report, girls' enrolment in primary school in developing countries improved in the 1990s. The girls' Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) increased by 4 percentage points, from 91.8 per cent. in 1990 to 96.2 per cent. in 1999. The Gender Parity Index (GPI), which measures the ratio between girls' and boys' enrolment rates, improved from 0.86 to 0.92 in developing countries.

Gender-disaggregated data on secondary education is less readily available. The participation rates for girls are increasing, but where there are major gender disparities in primary education, this is amplified at the secondary level; hence some of the lowest levels of secondary enrolment for girls are in Central and West Africa.

We are collaborating with a variety of partners to accelerate progress for girls' education. We are working with the UN Girls' Education Initiative to ensure stronger co-ordination among donors at the global and the national level. We are supporting a partnership with the World bank and UNICEF to develop sustainable strategies for girls' education in several countries. We have built close links with the gender unit in the Education group at the World bank to foster better integration of gender issues with international education initiatives.

We have three initiatives under way to give greater support to DFID country advisers to address girls' education and mainstream it in their work. We have developed a manual on girls' education, which is currently being disseminated. We are working to provide gender modules for inclusion in existing training courses.

We have improved access to key policy documents and practical tools by establishing a joint World bank/ UNICEF/DFID website (www.girlseducation.org).

We are also supporting southern civil society organisations, including the Forum for African Women Educationalists (FAWE) in four countries (Rwanda, Zambia, Mozambique and Malawi).

Rwanda and Uganda

Mr. Ivan Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on her meeting with the Presidents of Rwanda and Uganda on 17 October 2002. [80889]

Clare Short: The meeting was the second review of the Memorandum of Understanding Presidents Museveni and Kagame and I signed in November last year at Lancaster House. They committed themselves again to not interfering in each others' political and security affairs. They agreed to make more effective use of the mechanisms that had been put in place to resolve differences and to avoid recourse to the use of the media. The UK agreed to continue to act as third party in this process.

Equally importantly the two Presidents agreed to work together to achieve peace and stability in the region. They urged President Mbeki of South Africa, as Chairman of the African Union, to convene a Regional Summit to call on all parties to fully implement the Pretoria and Luanda Agreements.

Presidents Museveni and Kagame shared our concern at the situation in Burundi and agreed we should work together, especially with the Governments of Tanzania and South Africa, to get a get a cease fire agreed and support the Transitional National Government under the Arusha Accords.

Safe Water

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what efforts the Government has made to ensure that the commitments made at the Johannesburg Summit to provide access to safe water are kept by all states. [81056]

Clare Short: The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), including the target to halve by 2015 the proportion of people without sustainable access to safe drinking water, provide the focus of my Department's work. We are working to build an effective response by the international system to support developing countries in reducing poverty and achieving the MDGs. This includes supporting the United Nations Development Programme in monitoring progress by country towards the MDGs.

An integrated approach to water supply, sanitation and hygiene is the best way to improve health and combat poverty. We currently support three major multilateral initiatives:

The Water and Sanitation Program (WSP), a multi-donor programme administered by the World Bank. Its mission is to eradicate poverty by helping the poor gain sustained access to improved water and sanitation services.

The Global Water Partnership, an international network to foster integrated water resource management

The Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council (WSSCC), a concerted multi-donor organization designed to raise awareness and the political profile of sanitation, hygiene and safe water.

In addition to multilateral co-operation, our commitment to achieve the 2015 water and sanitation targets includes bilateral programmes in many countries in the developing world including Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nepal, India, south Africa, Uganda, and Nigeria. My Department also supports UNICEF's water, environment and sanitation programme.

Southern Africa

Mr. Sarwar: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what emergency aid has been provided to Southern Africa in recent months. [80751]

Clare Short: We have made the following bilateral commitments since September 2001 in response to the humanitarian crisis in Southern Africa:

Date	*Country*	*Description*	*Total £ million*
September 2001	Zimbabwe	NGO feeding programme	4.0
	Zimbabwe	WFP Emergency Appeal	3.5
	Malawi	Targeted Inputs programme	3.75
January–May 2002	Malawi	NGO feeding programmes	4.4
	Malawi	Winter Inputs programme	1.2
June 2002	Zimbabwe	WFP Regional Emergency Feeding Operation	7.0
	Lesotho	WFP Regional Emergency Feeding Operation	1.56
	Malawi	WFP Regional Emergency Feeding Operation	5.0
	Swaziland	WFP Regional Emergency Feeding Operation	0.25
	Zambia	WFP Regional Emergency Feeding Operation	5.0
	Zambia	NGO food for work programme	1.02
	Region	WFP logistical support in Johannesburg regional hub, Lesotho and Zimbabwe	0.51
	Region	SADC vulnerability assessments to improve targeting	0.2
	Region	IFRC Feeding HIV/AIDS affected people	2.5
	Region	WHO regional health operation	0.13
	Malawi	Targeted inputs programme	6.8
	Zimbabwe	NGO agricultural inputs	5.0
	Zimbabwe	WHO essential drugs and medicines	2.5
September 2002	Zimbabwe	NGO feeding programme	16.0
	Malawi/Region	Nacala Rail-link	4.1

Date	Country	Description	Total £ million
October 2002	Zambia	Agricultural recovery through NGO's and FAO	1.5
	Zambia	Improved nutrition programme	1.2
	Zambia	Support to the health sector	0.2
	Region	OCHA Southern African Humanitarian Information Service	0.11
	Region	Southern Africa Humanitarian Crisis Unit for monitoring and liaison	0.5
	Lesotho	Livelihoods recovery through agriculture programme	1.0
	Zimbabwe	Epidemic preparedness	1.2
	Zimbabwe	Improved nutrition programme	1.1
Total since September 2001		Humanitarian assistance and recovery programmes	81.23

Breakdown by country since September 2001

Country	
Malawi	25.25
Zimbabwe	40.3
Lesotho	2.56
Swaziland	0.25
Zambia	8.92
Regional	3.95

In addition, our contribution to commitments by the European Commission to date is about £21.3 million.

Zimbabwe

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development whether her Department has detailed contingency plans for delivering food to the people of Zimbabwe in the event of an emergency. [80575]

Clare Short: The humanitarian situation in Zimbabwe is already an emergency to which my Department has been responding for over a year. To date we have committed more than £38 million for emergency food provision, health care, agricultural inputs, and monitoring. This has been successfully channelled through UN agencies and non-governmental partners.

We are working closely with the internationally mandated organisations to ensure that appropriate contingency plans are in place for a number of scenarios, including the displacement of people. In the event of deterioration in the situation, we will continue to work with agencies already operational on the ground, with the capability, capacity, and access to deliver assistance.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Correspondence

David Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will reply to the letter from the hon. Member for Walsall, North of 17 October regarding a constituent, ref: 517205. [81071]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 18 November 2002]:* I regret that I am unable to trace this letter from the details given. If further information on the constituent's name and address could be forwarded to me, I will be happy to investigate the matter further.

David Winnick: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will reply to the letter from the hon. Member for Walsall, North of 16 September, regarding a constituent, ref: 19031/2. [81094]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 18 November 2002]:* A reply to the letter was sent on 12 November. I apologise for the delay in replying.

National Asylum Support Service (Liverpool)

Mrs. Ellman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department, what progress has been made with the inquiry conducted into NASS supervision of Landmark Co. in Liverpool; and what change he proposes to make in relation to NASS. [81100]

Beverley Hughes *[holding answer 18 November 2002]:* The independent inquiry team has completed its investigation and I am expecting to receive the final report shortly. Until I have seen and considered the report I cannot say whether any changes will be made in relation to National Asylum Support Service (NASS).

Police Officers (Nottinghamshire)

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to change the number of police officers in Nottinghamshire Constabulary's 'B' Division. [80704]

Mr. Denham: The deployment of Nottinghamshire Police officers is a matter for the Chief Constable to determine. At the end of March 2002 Nottinghamshire Police had 2,330 police officers, 55 more than in March 2001. The force also had 1,087 civilian support staff at the end of March, 48 more than in March of last year.

EDUCATION AND SKILLS

School Transport

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what quality standards are in place for home-to-school transport; and what changes to these standards *(a)* have taken place and *(b)* are planned. [81731]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: LEA contracted home-to-school transport services are covered by Best Value, which was introduced in the Local Government Act 1999 as a means of securing greater value for money from local government services. Best Value is a statutory requirement for local authorities.

Should schools choose to purchase their own transport services DfES has produced the 'Purchasing Guide for Schools' which offers a working guide for

school managers to help them set high quality standards when procuring and managing school transport contracts.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) what funding mechanisms are available directly from his Department to *(a)* local authorities and *(b)* other education bodies for improving school transport in order to improve child truancy rates; and what the total amount paid from his Department was for improving school transport in each year since 1992; [81735]

(2) what research has been conducted and is planned by his Department on the implications on child truancy rates of changes in home-to-school transport which have taken place and which could arise from additional improvements in home-to-school transport. [81734]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: We are currently conducting research into the causes of absence from school in order to fully understand the issues. We are not specifically looking at truancy in relation to home-to-school transport, as previous research has not shown there to be a link. There is no funding directly available for improving school transport in order to improve child truancy rates.

The DfES has spent the following amounts on home-to- school transport since 1992:

	Total (£ million)	*Percentage annual rise in expenditure*
1992–93	293	—
1993–94	288	—
1994–95	319	11
1995–96	345	8
1996–97	382	11
1997–98	418	9
1998–99	444	6
1999–2000	485	9
2000–01[1]	532	10

[1] provisional

Classroom Assistants (Ilford, North)

Linda Perham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what plans he has to improve the *(a)* pay, *(b)* training and *(c)* career prospects of classroom assistants in Ilford, North. [80538]

Mr. Miliband: The pay of teaching assistants is a matter for local authorities and schools to determine. A consultative document "Developing the role of school support staff" was published on 22 October, and sets out plans for career routes and the creation of standards and training for a new higher level role for teaching assistants. Copies have been placed in the Library of the House.

Departmental Website

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills whether the Department's website is managed internally or externally of the Department. [80593]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: A small core team within the Department for Education and Skills, run the Department's website, including managing a range of key partners who provide particular website services, for example: hosting of the website; design and building of new sub sites; user research and site measurement.

Dyslexia

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what arrangements are in place to assist pupils/students with specific learning disabilities, with particular reference to dyslexia, when they are completing tests or examinations; and if he will make a statement. [80818]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: A wide range of special arrangements are in place to assist pupils with special educational needs, including those with specific learning difficulties, such as dyslexia, when they come to take tests and examinations.

The arrangements for dyslexic candidates taking public examinations are determined by the relevant awarding bodies. The most common arrangement permitted for such candidates is additional time in which to complete the examination. The use of readers, writers and word processors are also permitted in exceptional circumstances. Appropriate evidence must support each case, and the decision rests with the awarding body.

Special arrangements are also permitted in relation to the National Curriculum Assessment Key Stage tests. Details of these are set out in the "Assessment and Reporting Arrangements" booklets produced by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority, sent to all schools in England in October of the year before the tests are due to be taken. When considering what special arrangements might be needed, the focus should always be on the needs of the individual child. Arrangements might range from additional time to the use of readers, amanuenses, transcripts, communicators, signers, and rest breaks.

Education Projects (Buckinghamshire)

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will list the projects to which his Department has allocated funding in *(a)* Chesham and Amersham and *(b)* Buckinghamshire since 1 January 1997, indicating the amount in each case. [81187]

Mr. Miliband: The following tables show the total amounts provided by the Department through the standards fund and capital programmes in the Chesham and Amersham constituency and Buckinghamshire local education authority since 1997–98. Chesham and Amersham figures are part of the Buckinghamshire figures.

It is not possible to give the standards fund allocations within the Chesham and Amersham constituency. The standards fund includes both Government grant and local authority contributions. Copies of tables giving a breakdown of the funding for these programmes have been placed in the House of Commons Library.

Chesham and Amersham Constituency

£

Year	Voluntary aided schools capital	New deal for schools capital[1]
1997–98	—	—
1998–99	531,568	119,633
1999–2000	194,067	406,000
2000–01	180,137	1,328,250
2001–02	124,100	—
2002–03	340,119	—

[1] Since 2000–01 capital support has been allocated to LEAs and schools on a formulaic basis. Buckinghamshire LEA will have details of funding going to individual schools.

Buckingham local education authority

£

Year	Standards fund	Voluntary aided schools capital	New deal for schools capital
1997–98	2,947,244	135,037	564,000
1998–99	5,494,901	648,466	1,088,633
1999–2000	10,542,386	520,335	1,622,015
2000–01	15,498,610	460,299	5,543,081
2001–02	19,417,523	762,071	5,600,000
2002–03	21,457,110	6,928,634	10,300,00

Higher Education Finance

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much his Department has paid to universities in each of the past two years as special payments arising from the normal residence of students being in specified postcode areas. [81820]

Margaret Hodge: The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) allocated £27 million in the 2001–02 academic year and £36 million in 2002–03 to higher education institutions in England in connection with the education of students from specified postcode areas.

IT Security

Brian White: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what steps he has taken to review the security of the Department's IT system; and how many digital attacks there were on the Department's system in *(a)* October and *(b)* 2002. [80773]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Department for Education and Skills has a dedicated team to assure that the Department's network and data are secure from attack. They have recently undertaken an exercise to achieve compliance with the Information Security Standard (BS7799) and all systems follow guidance outlined in the Central Government Manual of Protective Security.

There were no digital attacks reported in either October or the whole of 2002.

Local Government Funding

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many representations his Department has received from Eddisbury constituency residents about local government funding in the last 12 months; and if he will make a statement on the arguments in those representations. [81265]

Mr. Miliband: The Department has answered 88 letters in connection with the funding of schools in Cheshire over the last year. Six of these letters were from the hon. Member, but it is not possible to identify which Cheshire constituency the rest came from. In addition a number of Cheshire residents responded to the consultation on Local Government Funding reform which closed on 30 September: to identify precisely these letters from among the very large numbers of responses to the consultation would incur disproportionate cost.

We are carefully considering all responses to the consultation document and will publish an analysis by the time of the provisional settlement for 2003–04, when we will announce decisions on the new funding system.

Qualifications (Children in Care)

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what recent research his Department has conducted into the educational qualifications obtained by children in residential care compared to those of similar ages in the general population; and if he will make a statement. [80472]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: The Department has recently conducted (or been involved in) extensive research into the educational qualifications of looked after children although these research projects have not looked exclusively at children in residential care homes. Available evidence suggests that children in residential care have much poorer outcomes than those in a stable foster care placement.

Figures on the educational achievements of care leavers are collected by the Department of Health. Full data is available on these achievements for 6,555 children who left care in the year ending March 2001. Of these just over a quarter (n = 1,715) were in residential placements. Among this group, 22 per cent. achieved one or more GCSEs compared to 41 per cent. of those in other types of placements—Department of Health (2001).

The Department of Education and Skills, the Department of Health and the Local Government Association have commissioned the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) to undertake research into the educational achievement at Key Stage 4 of children in public care. This research is exploring in greater depth the Key Stage 4 performance of a cohort of pupils who were in public care in summer 2001. This includes children in residential care homes.

The Department has also just commissioned NFER to conduct research to identify best practice among schools and LEAs in helping these children to fulfil their educational potential. The research will include children in residential care homes although they will not be a specific focus of the research. The Department has also been working closely with the Social Exclusion Unit (SEU) on its project on raising the educational attainment of children in care. The SEU will report in early 2003.

Qualifications and Curriculum Authority

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills when he intends to publish a Memorandum of Understanding on the relationship

between his Department and the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority; and if he will make a statement. [81079]

Mr. Miliband *[holding answer 18 November2002]:* We will be preparing the Memorandum of Understanding in the light of the findings of Mike Tomlinson's report on longer term issues concerning examination standards and the role of QCA and the awarding bodies. We expect to receive this report at the end of November.

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment he has made of the Quinquennial Review of the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority; and if he will make a statement. [81080]

Mr. Miliband *[holding answer 18 November 2002]:* I welcome the Quinquennial Review report on QCA published in the summer. Since then new issues have arisen in the examination system, and a new chair and chief executive have been appointed at QCA. I look forward to receiving the authority's response to the report before the end of the year.

School Violence

Linda Perham: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what steps he is taking to reduce *(a)* the number and *(b)* the seriousness of incidences of violence in schools. [80534]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: I am very concerned to prevent violence in schools. We have invested in a major programme to improve pupil behaviour through systematic early intervention to reduce the likelihood of serious incidents. £66 million was made available in this year's Budget to the local education authorities with the highest crime levels, to promote good behaviour and tackle poor behaviour. This can be used partly towards personal safety training for staff.

We have also published a free guidance pack entitled "Bullying: don't Suffer in Silence" and I would encourage all schools to obtain a copy. It provides detailed advice on preventing bullying and violence between pupils. In addition we have made clear that where necessary head teachers can permanently exclude pupils responsible for violence against members of the school community.

Earlier this year we published "A legal toolkit for schools", which is free publication summarising the range of legal remedies available to schools when staff face violence or threatening behaviour from parents.

Schools Grant (Buckinghamshire)

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what grants were made through the school improvement grant in *(a)* Chesham and Amersham and *(b)* Buckinghamshire in 2001–02. [81185]

Mr. Miliband: Standards fund grants are allocated to local education authorities, so figures for Chesham and Amersham are not available. A total of £2.19 million was allocated to Buckinghamshire through the Standards Fund School Improvement Grant in the 2001–02 financial year, of which:

£1.31 million was required to be devolved to all maintained schools to raise levels of pupil attainment by funding activities in school development, post-Ofsted and raising attainment plans;

£350,000 was targeted at schools in special measures and secondary schools facing challenging circumstances to bring about urgent improvements; and

£446,000 was available to support direct interventions in schools facing challenging circumstances or support the priorities set out in Buckinghamshire's Educational Development Plans.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many newly qualified teachers in *(a)* Chesham and Amersham and *(b)* Buckinghamshire were entitled to induction support in 2001–02. [81183]

Mr. Miliband: All Newly Qualified Teachers (NQTs) who take-up a post of one term or more in a maintained school, or non-maintained special school, are entitled to induction.

During the 2001–02 academic year, a total of 195 NQTs undertook induction in Buckinghamshire, of which 53 were in the constituency of Chesham and Amersham.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will ensure that no schools in *(a)* Chesham and Amersham and *(b)* Buckinghamshire have a cash budget cut in the next financial year. [81188]

Mr. Miliband: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Castle Point (Bob Spink) on 6 November 2002, *Official Report,* column 396W.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many representations his Department has received in connection with the funding of *(a)* schools and *(b)* school pupils in *(i)* Chesham and Amersham and (ii) Buckinghamshire over the last year. [81191]

Mr. Miliband: The Department has answered 10 letters in connection with the funding of schools in Buckinghamshire over the last year. Two of these letters were from the hon. Member, and it is not possible to identify which Buckinghamshire constituency the rest came from.

In addition a number of Buckinghamshire residents responded to the consultation on Local Government Funding reform which closed on 30 September: to identify precisely these letters from among the very large numbers of responses to the consultation would incur disproportionate cost.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will list the secondary schools in *(a)* Chesham and Amersham and *(b)* Buckinghamshire which conduct cognitive ability tests in year 7. [81181]

Mr. Miliband: Cognitive ability tests for year 7 are commercial tests which schools can purchase if they wish. As such, the Department has no records of their usage on an individual school, local education authority, or national basis.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how much was spent through the standards fund on teaching assistants in *(a)* Chesham and Amersham and *(b)* Buckinghamshire in 2001–02. [81184]

Mr. Miliband: Details of standards fund expenditure by local education authorities for 2001–02 are not held centrally. Some £197 million was made available to authorities in 2001–02 through standards fund grant for the recruitment and training of teaching assistants, of which £1.732 million went to Buckinghamshire. 95 per cent. of this grant was required to be devolved to schools. Schools have freedom to move funding between standards fund headings according to their own detailed needs and priorities.

Information on standards fund allocations and expenditure is not collected at constituency level.

State Secondary Schools

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will list the different types of state secondary school. [81255]

Mr. Miliband: Maintained schools, both primary and secondary, are divided into the following categories:

1. Community schools
2. Foundation schools
3. Voluntary schools comprising:
   a. voluntary aided schools
   b. voluntary controlled schools
4. Community special schools
5. Foundation special schools

Teacher Protection

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what protection is given to teachers who have violent and aggressive pupils who pose a threat to their safety. [80980]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: Violence, threatening behaviour and abuse against school staff or other members of the school community will not be tolerated. Section 64 of the School Standards and Framework Act gives a headteacher the authority to permanently exclude a pupil. Departmental guidance makes it clear that violent and aggressive pupils who pose a risk to teachers' or other pupils' safety can be permanently excluded for a first offence. The Secretary of State would normally regard it as inappropriate to re-instate a pupil who has been permanently excluded in circumstances involving actual or threatened violence against another pupil or member of staff.

Section 550A of the Education Act 1996 clarifies the powers of teachers, and other staff to use reasonable force to prevent pupils posing a threat to their safety in committing a crime, or causing injury, damage or disruption.

Further guidance is available in the form of a Departmental Circular 10/98, "Section 550A of the Education Act 1996: The Use of force to Control or Restrain Pupils". An additional guidance document is available for staff working in special schools catering for pupils with severe behavioural difficulties. This joint DfES/Department of Health guidance is entitled "Circular 0242/2002 Guidance on the Use of Restrictive Physical Interventions for Staff Working with Children and Adults who Display Extreme Behaviour in Association with Learning Disability and/or Autistic Spectrum Disorders".

Section 550A clarifies the general principle that anyone has the right to defend themselves against an attack provided they do not use a disproportionate degree of force to do so.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many teachers have been assaulted by pupils in each year since 1997. [80981]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: My Department has not collected this information. However, 135 serious injuries to teachers in Great Britain caused by physical violence were reported to the Health and Safety Executive in both 1999–2000 and 2000–01; data for 2001–02 is not yet available. This figure includes major injuries, and also injuries which resulted in more than three days' absence from work, as a result of assault reported to the HSE under the Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 1995. Information is not available on whether the assaults were carried out by pupils, parents or others.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what proposals he has to ensure that teachers who protect themselves from violent pupils are not prosecuted; and if he will make a statement. [80982]

Mr. Stephen Twigg: Section 550A of the Education Act 1996 clarifies the powers of teachers, and other staff to use reasonable force to prevent pupils committing a crime, or causing injury, damage or disruption. Further guidance is available in the form of a Departmental Circular 10/98, "Section 550A of the Education Act 1996: The Use of force to Control or Restrain Pupils". An additional guidance document is available for staff working in special schools catering for pupils with severe behavioural difficulties. This joint DfES/Department of Health guidance is entitled "Circular 0242/2002 Guidance on the Use of Restrictive Physical Interventions for Staff Working with Children and Adults who Display Extreme Behaviour in Association with Learning Disability and/or Autistic Spectrum Disorders".

Section 550A clarifies the general principle that anyone has the right to defend themselves against an attack provided they do not use a disproportionate degree of force to do so. Although there can be no guarantee that teachers who defend themselves from violent pupils will not be prosecuted, the Crown Prosecution Service would examine whether the use and degree of force was reasonable in all the circumstances, bearing in mind the provisions in section 550A of the Education Act 1996. In looking at individual cases they are also likely to take account of the school's policy on restraint, whether that had been followed, and the need to prevent injury, damage, or disruption.

Teacher's Pay

Mrs. Dean: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what the average salary cost is per teacher in each of the shire education authorities in England. [80598]

Mr. Miliband: The table shows the average salary and the average salary cost. The metropolitan authorities have been excluded, giving a table consisting of the LEAs that used to be classed as the shire counties.

Teachers'[1] average salary by Local Education Authority[2]

London Education Authority	*Average salary March[3] 2001 (£)*	*Average salary Cost[4] (£)*
Isles of Scilly	27,000	31,023
Bath & NE Somerset	[5]	[5]
City of Bristol	26,384	30,315
North Somerset	26,915	30,925
South Gloucestershire	26,478	30,424
Hartlepool	26,749	30,734
Middlesbrough	27,181	31,231
Redcar and Cleveland	26,901	30,910
Stockton on Tees	26,900	30,908
City of Kingston-Upon-Hull	27,105	31,144
East Riding of Yorkshire	27,187	31,238
North East Lincolnshire	27,175	31,224
North Lincolnshire	27,148	31,194
North Yorkshire	[5]	[5]
York	26,909	30,919
Bedfordshire	26,971	30,990
Luton	26,929	30,941
Buckinghamshire	26,971	30,990
Milton Keynes	26,678	30,652
Derbyshire	27,351	31,426
Derby	26,572	30,531
Dorset	26,968	30,986
Poole	26,800	30,793
Bournemouth	27,180	31,229
Durham	26,738	30,722
Darlington	25,379	29,160
East Sussex	26,996	31,019
Brighton & Hove	26,963	30,981
Hampshire	26,767	30,755
Portsmouth	26,712	30,692
Southampton	26,276	30,191
Leicestershire	27,006	31,030
Leicester City	[5]	[5]
Rutland	27,381	31,461
Staffordshire	26,707	30,687
Stoke	26,601	30,565
Wiltshire	25,663	29,487
Swindon	26,012	29,888
Bracknell Forest	27,763	31,900
Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead	27,752	31,888
West Berkshire	[5]	[5]
Reading	[5]	[5]
Slough	[5]	[5]
Wokingham	26,842	30,842
Cambridgeshire	[5]	[5]
City of Peterborough	26,360	30,288
Cheshire	26,837	30,836
Halton	27,054	31,085
Warrington	26,757	30,744
Devon	27,075	31,109
City of Plymouth	27,237	31,296
Torbay	[5]	[5]
Essex	27,534	31,637
Southend	27,501	31,599
Thurrock	27,104	31,142
Herefordshire	26,910	30,920
Worcestershire	26,952	30,967
Kent	27,089	31,125
Medway	[5]	[5]
Lancashire	27,276	31,340
Blackburn and Darwen	26,196	30,099
Blackpool	26,519	30,470
Nottinghamshire	27,497	31,594
City of Nottingham	26,907	30,916
York	26,909	30,919
Bedfordshire	26,971	30,990
Luton	26,929	30,941
Buckinghamshire	26,971	30,990
Milton Keynes	26,678	30,652
Derbyshire	27,351	31,426
Derby	26,572	30,531
Dorset	26,968	30,986
Poole	26,800	30,793
Bournemouth	27,180	31,229
Durham	26,738	30,722
Darlington	25,379	29,160
East Sussex	26,996	31,019
Brighton & Hove	26,963	30,981
Hampshire	26,767	30,755
Portsmouth	26,712	30,692
Southampton	26,276	30,191
Leicestershire	27,006	31,030
Leicester City	[5]	[5]
Rutland	27,381	31,461
Staffordshire	26,707	30,687
Stoke	26,601	30,565
Wiltshire	25,663	29,487
Swindon	26,012	29,888
Bracknell Forest	27,763	31,900
Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead	27,752	31,888
West Berkshire	[5]	[5]
Reading	[5]	[5]
Slough	[5]	[5]
Wokingham	26,842	30,842
Cambridgeshire	[5]	[5]
City of Peterborough	26,360	30,288
Cheshire	26,837	30,836
Halton	27,054	31,085
Warrington	26,757	30,744
Devon	27,075	31,109
City of Plymouth	27,237	31,296
Torbay	[5]	[5]
Essex	27,534	31,637
Southend	27,501	31,599
Thurrock	27,104	31,142
Herefordshire	26,910	30,920
Worcestershire	26,952	30,967
Kent	27,089	31,125
Medway	[5]	[5]
Lancashire	27,276	31,340
Blackburn and Darwen	26,196	30,099
Blackpool	26,519	30,470
Nottinghamshire	27,497	31,594
City of Nottingham	26,907	30,916
York	26,909	30,919
Bedfordshire	26,971	30,990
Luton	26,929	30,941
Buckinghamshire	26,971	30,990
Milton Keynes	26,678	30,652
Derbyshire	27,351	31,426
Derby	26,572	30,531
Dorset	26,968	30,986
Poole	26,800	30,793
Bournemouth	27,180	31,229
Durham	26,738	30,722
Darlington	25,379	29,160
East Sussex	26,996	31,019
Brighton & Hove	26,963	30,981
Hampshire	26,767	30,755
Portsmouth	26,712	30,692
Southampton	26,276	30,191
Leicestershire	27,006	31,030
Leicester City	[5]	[5]
Rutland	27,381	31,461
Staffordshire	26,707	30,687
Stoke	26,601	30,565
Wiltshire	25,663	29,487
Swindon	26,012	29,888
Bracknell Forest	27,763	31,900
Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead	27,752	31,888
West Berkshire	[5]	[5]
Reading	[5]	[5]
Slough	[5]	[5]
Wokingham	26,842	30,842
Cambridgeshire	[5]	[5]
City of Peterborough	26,360	30,288
Cheshire	26,837	30,836
Halton	27,054	31,085
Warrington	26,757	30,744
Devon	27,075	31,109
City of Plymouth	27,237	31,296
Torbay	[5]	[5]
Essex	27,534	31,637
Southend	27,501	31,599
Thurrock	27,104	31,142
Herefordshire	26,910	30,920
Worcestershire	26,952	30,967
Kent	27,089	31,125
Medway	[5]	[5]
Lancashire	27,276	31,340
Blackburn and Darwen	26,196	30,099
Blackpool	26,519	30,470
Nottinghamshire	27,497	31,594
City of Nottingham	26,907	30,916
York	26,909	30,919
Bedfordshire	26,971	30,990
Luton	26,929	30,941
Buckinghamshire	26,971	30,990
Milton Keynes	26,678	30,652
Derbyshire	27,351	31,426
Derby	26,572	30,531
Dorset	26,968	30,986
Poole	26,800	30,793
Bournemouth	27,180	31,229
Durham	26,738	30,722
Darlington	25,379	29,160
East Sussex	26,996	31,019
Brighton & Hove	26,963	30,981
Hampshire	26,767	30,755
Portsmouth	26,712	30,692
Southampton	26,276	30,191
Leicestershire	27,006	31,030
Leicester City	[5]	[5]
Rutland	27,381	31,461
Staffordshire	26,707	30,687
Stoke	26,601	30,565
Wiltshire	25,663	29,487
Swindon	26,012	29,888
Bracknell Forest	27,763	31,900
Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead	27,752	31,888
West Berkshire	[5]	[5]
Reading	[5]	[5]
Slough	[5]	[5]
Wokingham	26,842	30,842
Cambridgeshire	[5]	[5]
City of Peterborough	26,360	30,288
Cheshire	26,837	30,836
Halton	27,054	31,085
Warrington	26,757	30,744
Devon	27,075	31,109
City of Plymouth	27,237	31,296
Torbay	[5]	[5]
Essex	27,534	31,637
Southend	27,501	31,599
Thurrock	27,104	31,142
Herefordshire	26,910	30,920
Worcestershire	26,952	30,967
Kent	27,089	31,125
Medway	[5]	[5]
Lancashire	27,276	31,340
Blackburn and Darwen	26,196	30,099
Blackpool	26,519	30,470
Nottinghamshire	27,497	31,594

Teachers'[1] average salary by Local Education Authority[2]

London Education Authority	*Average salary March[3] 2001 (£)*	*Average salary Cost[4] (£)*
City of Nottingham	26,907	30,916
York	26,909	30,919
Bedfordshire	26,971	30,990
Luton	26,929	30,941
Buckinghamshire	26,971	30,990
Milton Keynes	26,678	30,652
Derbyshire	27,351	31,426
Derby	26,572	30,531
Dorset	26,968	30,986
Poole	26,800	30,793
Bournemouth	27,180	31,229
Durham	26,738	30,722
Darlington	25,379	29,160
East Sussex	26,996	31,019
Brighton & Hove	26,963	30,981
Hampshire	26,767	30,755
Portsmouth	26,712	30,692
Southampton	26,276	30,191
Leicestershire	27,006	31,030
Leicester City		
Rutland	27,381	31,461
Staffordshire	26,707	30,687
Stoke	26,601	30,565
Wiltshire	25,663	29,487
Swindon	26,012	29,888
Bracknell Forest	27,763	31,900
Royal Borough of Windsor & Maidenhead	27,752	31,888
West Berkshire	[5]	[5]
Reading	[5]	[5]
Slough	[5]	[5]
Wokingham	26,842	30,842
Cambridgeshire	[5]	[5]
City of Peterborough	26,360	30,288
Cheshire	26,837	30,836
Halton	27,054	31,085
Warrington	26,757	30,744
Devon	27,075	31,109
City of Plymouth	27,237	31,296
Torbay	[5]	[5]
Essex	27,534	31,637
Southend	27,501	31,599
Thurrock	27,104	31,142
Herefordshire	26,910	30,920
Worcestershire	26,952	30,967
Kent	27,089	31,125
Medway	[5]	[5]
Lancashire	27,276	31,340
Blackburn and Darwen	26,196	30,099
Blackpool	26,519	30,470
Nottinghamshire	27,497	31,594
City of Nottingham	26,907	30,916
Shropshire	27,413	31,497
Telford and Wrekin	27,217	31,273
[illegible]wall	27,071	31,105
[illegible]mbria	27,089	31,125
Gloucestershire	[5]	[5]
Hertfordshire	25,312	29,083
Isle of Wight	26,491	30,438
Lincolnshire	26,924	30,936
Norfolk	27,128	31,170
Northamptonshire	26,644	30,614
Northumberland	26,794	30,786
Oxfordshire	27,077	31,112
Somerset	27,334	31,406
Suffolk	26,548	30,504
Surrey	25,622	29,440
Warwickshire	26,962	30,980
West Sussex	26,811	30,806

[1] Includes full time teachers from the leadership group and classroom teachers.

[2] Excluding metropolitan LEAs and London boroughs.

[3] Average salary of full-time teachers in the maintained sector of England. Figures cover all grades and include any allowances paid. Figures exclude sixth form colleges. The salary figures include threshold pay increases. However, they do not include threshold pay increases relating to people who passed the threshold in September 2000 and had not received their payment

by March 2001. This money was backdated after March 2001 and therefore the average salary for March 2001 will be understated.
[4] Average salary cost includes employment costs
[5] Not available.
Source:
DfES database of teacher records.

Mrs. Dean: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what proportion of classroom teachers are on the top of the main scale or have progressed through the upper pay spine in each education authority in England. [80594]

Mr. Miliband: The following table shows the latest available teacher data.

Percentage[1] of qualified classroom teachers on point 9 of the main pay scale andthe post-threshold scale as at 31 March 2001[2]
Maintained schools sector in England

	Main scale point 9	Upper pay scale	Not known[3]
City of London	8.3	0.0	33.3
Camden	21.9	29.8	12.3
Greenwich	54.7	10.0	2.7
Hackney	17.9	0.2	20.3
Hammersmith	18.5	31.8	16.9
Islington	32.8	5.1	25.2
Kensington and Chelsea	[5]	[5]	[5]
Lambeth	[5]	[5]	[5]
Lewisham	22.2	34.1	10.2
Southwark	39.9	2.5	20.4
Tower Hamlets	40.7	4.1	30.9
Wandsworth	[5]	[5]	[5]
Westminster	13.2	2.1	28.9
Barking	19.6	35.8	4.3
Barnet	23.2	36.9	3.4
Bexley	20.1	39.7	2.9
Brent	[5]	[5]	[5]
Bromley	20.3	26.7	18.3
Croydon	[5]	[5]	[5]
Ealing	28.4	30.6	2.7
Enfield	46.0	11.3	8.4
Haringey	20.1	38.4	8.7
Harrow	12.1	45.7	26.5
Havering	15.4	43.4	14.5
Hillingdon	16.7	32.7	11.1
Hounslow	17.4	38.4	2.2
Kingston-upon-Thames	[5]	[5]	[5]
Merton	[5]	[5]	[5]
Newham	22.9	26.1	0.4
Redbridge	15.3	45.2	7.1
Richmond-upon-Thames	26.2	17.7	29.7
Sutton	[5]	[5]	[5]
Waltham Forest	33.5	31.4	3.3
Birmingham	15.8	48.9	3.4
Coventry	12.0	53.4	1.2
Dudley	16.6	50.4	2.0
Sandwell	20.4	44.2	0.9
Solihull	20.6	10.8	2.8
Walsall	22.0	15.2	6.4
Wolverhampton	23.1	48.3	2.8
Knowsley	16.6	44.5	3.1
Liverpool	66.1	1.0	4.9
St. Helens	12.6	58.2	1.6
Sefton	12.4	50.5	6.3
Wirral	11.2	57.9	8.5
Bolton	14.9	50.1	6.1
Bury	15.7	59.0	0.5
Manchester	16.5	24.9	24.5
Oldham	16.6	48.1	2.2
Rochdale	14.9	48.7	5.4
Salford	19.0	1.1	12.6
Stockport	15.3	53.1	5.0
Tameside	11.9	53.4	4.2
Trafford	10.5	49.5	13.6
Wigan	12.1	56.3	4.9
Barnsley	18.9	48.0	16.2
Doncaster	17.1	51.8	4.5
Rotherham	15.3	54.3	4.2
Sheffield	29.8	33.6	10.5
Bradford	25.1	47.3	2.4

Percentage[1] of qualified classroom teachers on point 9 of the main pay scale andthe post-threshold scale as at 31 March 2001[2]
Maintained schools sector in England

	Main scale point 9	Upper pay scale	Not known[3]
Calderdale	19.4	43.6	11.0
Kirklees	13.6	56.8	5.6
Leeds	14.1	45.6	15.1
Wakefield	16.0	48.4	1.8
Gateshead	15.8	1.0	50.7
Newcastle-upon-Tyne	10.8	9.4	62.3
North Tyneside	16.1	48.6	5.4
South Tyneside	8.3	4.3	60.9
Sunderland	12.6	53.7	16.5
Isles of Scilly	42.1	0.0	26.3
Bath and north-east Somerset	25.1	35.8	3.8
City of Bristol	24.2	38.4	0.9
North Somerset	19.8	47.3	3.1
South Gloucestershire	19.3	45.0	1.6
Hartlepool	14.5	49.6	6.8
Middlesbrough	12.6	54.2	3.5
Redcar and Cleveland	13.4	53.5	2.2
Stockton-on-Tees	16.6	50.9	11.6
City of Kingston-Upon-Hull	15.9	51.8	1.6
East Riding of Yorkshire	15.0	55.2	1.6
North-east Lincolnshire	16.2	53.7	1.4
North Lincolnshire	17.6	52.7	2.4
North Yorkshire	27.9	39.0	5.8
York	16.6	51.5	3.2
Bedfordshire	26.1	41.7	2.5
Luton	23.1	39.6	3.1
Buckinghamshire	24.8	35.2	4.9
Milton Keynes	21.1	42.4	1.3
Derbyshire	16.6	49.1	7.0
City of Derby	28.2	10.5	38.2
Dorset	16.4	51.0	1.0
Poole	15.8	48.1	2.9
Bournemouth	15.7	49.4	1.7
Durham	23.0	43.1	1.3
Darlington	31.6	1.0	41.4
East Sussex	15.7	47.6	6.6
Brighton and Hove	12.6	44.5	10.7
Hampshire	16.8	40.1	13.7
Portsmouth	16.7	37.6	18.3
Southampton	16.1	37.3	9.3
Leicestershire	12.4	51.8	5.0
Leicester City	16.6	30.9	28.7
Rutland	24.4	41.1	3.8
Staffordshire	23.7	41.9	2.1
Stoke-on-Trent	14.7	47.8	2.1
Wiltshire	22.0	42.4	2.9
Swindon	16.4	33.8	9.7
Bracknell Forest	24.5	41.0	1.7
Windsor and Maidenhead	22.2	41.0	6.1
West Berkshire	22.2	37.4	6.2
Reading	25.5	33.9	4.8
Slough	46.1	9.6	12.2
Wokingham	40.3	0.8	29.7
Cambridgeshire	33.2	1.1	32.8
City of Peterborough	22.5	38.6	5.0
Cheshire	17.8	1.3	49.5
Halton	14.2	52.0	1.1
Warrington	16.5	46.0	2.3
Devon	18.5	49.0	2.8
City of Plymouth	14.2	49.4	1.4
Torbay	30.6	51.0	8.2
Essex	18.9	44.6	3.3
Southend	22.0	42.3	2.1
Thurrock	3.9	18.4	8.5
Herefordshire	19.5	48.4	2.2
Worcestershire	17.0	49.3	6.3
Kent	18.9	44.7	2.9
Medway	26.8	4.0	43.4
Lancashire	17.9	52.9	3.7
Blackburn and Darwen	40.7	0.5	43.8
Blackpool	16.2	47.9	2.6
Nottinghamshire	16.5	51.4	10.8
City of Nottingham	20.0	42.6	5.5
Shropshire	16.0	55.5	1.8
Telford and Wrekin	15.5	53.1	3.0
Cornwall	16.6	2.9	52.7
Cumbria	18.9	49.3	2.5
Gloucestershire	19.8	38.9	6.3

Percentage[1] of qualified classroom teachers on point 9 of the main pay scale andthe post-threshold scale as at 31 March 2001[2]

Maintained schools sector in England

	Main scale point 9	*Upper pay scale*	*Not known[3]*
Hertfordshire	47.0	13.9	2.2
Isle of Wight	19.0	45.9	3.4
Lincolnshire	17.0	41.9	11.6
Norfolk	13.1	2.4	48.4
Northamptonshire	20.4	1.8	44.7
Northumberland	44.6	24.5	2.0
Oxfordshire	17.6	45.9	2.3
Somerset	17.4	23.5	35.6
Suffolk	47.0	20.9	2.9
Surrey	49.5	10.0	3.5
Warwickshire	18.9	47.7	0.7
West Sussex	20.5	44.0	3.0

[1] Percentage is based on all classroom teachers, including advanced skills teachers.
[2] Provisional.
[3] Not available.

Note:
Following changes to the pay system in September 2000, an unusually high number of teachers were shown with a spine point of 'not known'. The majority of these teachers are expected to be on either spine point 9 or the post-threshold scale.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills how many teachers in *(a)* Chesham and Amersham and *(b)* Buckinghamshire were entitled to a golden hello in 2001–02. [81182]

Mr. Miliband: The information is not collected centrally. The information that is available to my Department on the number of Golden Hello claimants in 2001–02 was given in my answer to the hon. Member for Harrogate and Knaresborough (Mr. Willis) on 6 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 394W.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what assessment he has made of *(a)* the number and *(b)* the percentage of teachers *(i)* passing the threshold for performance-related pay and (ii) rising up the enhanced pay spine having passed the threshold in Chesham and Amersham and Buckinghamshire; and if he will make a statement. [81186]

Mr. Miliband: The data are collected at LEA rather than constituency level. Nearly 2,000 teachers applied for the Performance Threshold in Buckinghamshire in rounds 1 and 2, with a success rate of 97 per cent. Teachers who were placed on point 1 of the Upper Pay Scale in Round 1 were first eligible to progress to point 2 in September 2002. It is too early to compile details of the numbers who have done so at present.

TREASURY

Advertising Campaigns

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much has been spent on advertising campaigns undertaken since 1997 by *(a)* the Register of Friendly Societies, *(b)* the Government Actuary's Department and *(c)* OGC Buying Solutions; and if he will make a statement. [80651]

Ruth Kelly: Neither the Registry of Friendly Societies (since 1997) nor OGC Buying Solutions (since its inception in 2001) have incurred expenditure on advertising campaigns.

Annual advertising expenditure for the Government Actuary's Department is set out in the table. Most of this expenditure relates to costs associated with recruitment advertising for trainee actuaries.

Year	*Expenditure (000)*
1997–98	33
1998–99	53
1999–2000	50
2000–01	39
2001–02	46
2002–03 to date	34

Aviation Gasoline

Mr. Lilley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he plans to tax aviation gasoline. [80709]

John Healey: Aviation gasoline (AVGAS) is taxable at a duty rate of 27.34 pence per litre.

Births, Deaths and Marriages

Mr. Dhanda: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) when birth, marriage and death certificates will begin to be digitised; [81781]

(2) what plans he has to digitise existing birth, marriage and death certificates. [81780]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr. Dhanda, dated 19 November 2002:

As Registrar General and National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your recent questions about what plans there are to digitise existing birth, marriage and death certificates and when birth, marriage and death certificates will begin to be digitised. (81780, 81781)

The Government's proposals for modernising civil registration in England and Wales are contained in the White Paper "Civil Registration: Vital Change" published on 22 January 2002. One of the proposals in the White Paper is that both modern and historic records should be computerised.

It has been announced that provisions contained in the Regulatory Reform Act 2002 will be used to amend the law to allow for the computerisation of these records. In line with the requirements of the Regulatory Reform Act, a consultation document setting out the proposals in more detail is due to be published in summer 2003. If the proposals are accepted it is expected that the new legislation will be in place by the end of 2004. Once the legislation is in place the process to digitise the birth, marriage and death certificates can begin.

Child Tax Credit

Phil Sawford: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the percentage of families in the Kettering constituency which will benefit from the Child Tax Credit to be introduced next April. [80418]

Dawn Primarolo: Nine out of ten families with children will be eligible for the Child Tax Credit which will be introduced in April 2003.

Estimates of the number of families with children in the Kettering constituency that will benefit from the Child Tax Credit are not available, however an

estimated 380,000 families with children in the East Midlands are expected to benefit from the Child Tax Credit.

Credit Card Fraud

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions he has had with the Home Office regarding methods of addressing credit card fraud; and if his Department is taking steps to reduce the level of crime in this area. [80736]

Ruth Kelly: HM Treasury works closely with the Home Office, DTI and other Government Departments on a wide range of issues relating to financial crime. Recent government initiatives to reduce the incidence of credit card fraud include the pilot of a dedicated police unit to combat cheque and plastic crime. The banking industry has also committed to introducing chip cards for authentication of credit and debit transactions by 2005, together with a cardholder verification system using a personal identification number (PIN).

European Central Bank

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions he has had with his European counterparts on, and what assessment his Department has made, concerning independence of the European Central bank. [80740]

Ruth Kelly: The Chancellor has frequent discussions with his EU counterparts on a range of issues. I refer the hon. Member to chapter 18 of Reforming Britain's economic and financial policy—towards greater economic stability published by HM Treasury this year. A copy can be found in the library of the House.

Future Builders Fund

Mr. Gray: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he will announce the size, purpose and eligibility parameters of the Future Builders Fund. [80747]

Mr. Boateng: The size of the Future Builders Fund, £125 million over three years, was announced by the Chancellor in the Spending Review on 15 July 2002. The purpose of the fund is to assist organisations in the voluntary and community sector in their public service work. The fund is being designed in close collaboration with the voluntary and community sector, in accordance with the provisions of the Compact on relations between Government and the sector. Final decisions about eligibility will be announced in spring 2003.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what role the Future Builders Fund will have in modernising the community and voluntary sector. [80748]

Mr. Boateng: The Future Builders Fund will provide strategic investment to assist Voluntary and Community Sector organisations to modernise in pursuit of delivering high quality public services. The fund is being designed in close collaboration with the sector, who will be leading in developing proposals outlining the modernisation measures that the fund could resource. Final decisions on eligibility criteria will be announced in spring 2003.

Mr. Gray: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if *(a)* sport, *(b)* art and *(c)* recreation will be allowable purposes of the Futures Builders Fund. [80749]

Mr. Boateng: The target service areas for the futurebuilders fund are closely linked to Government's key priorities. The fund will be available to enhance voluntary and community sector service delivery in health and social care, crime and social cohesion, education and learning, and in services for children and young people.

Growth

Mr. Howard: To ask Mr Chancellor of the Exchequer what the level of growth of *(a)* GDP, *(b)* household consumption, *(c)* Government consumption, *(d)* investment, *(e)* exports and *(f)* imports was in the last two quarters. [80417]

Ruth Kelly: The Information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply

Letter from Colin Mowl to Michael Howard on 19 November 2002:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your recent question concerning what the level of growth of *(a)* GDP, *(b)* household consumption, *(c)* Government consumption, *(d)* investment, *(e)* exports and *(f)* imports in the last two quarters was. I am replying in his absence. (90417)

The following table shows percentage growth rates over the previous quarter for the main expenditure components of GDP in the latest two available quarters.

	2002 Q1	*2002 Q2*	*2002 Q3*
(a) GDP	0.1	0.6	[1]0.7
(b) Household Expenditure	0.5	1.4	n/a
(c) Government Consumption	2.9	−2.7	n/a
(d) Gross Fixed Capital Formation (Investment)	−1.6	−0.1	n/a
(e) Exports	−0.1	3.5	n/a
(f) Imports	1.4	0.6	n/a

[1] Only total GDP has been published so far for 2001Q3.

Source:

Quarterly National Accounts National Statistics first release

Income Tax

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people were in each income tax bracket in each year since 1992. [81953]

Dawn Primarolo: I refer the hon. Member to National Statistics table 2.1 on Inland Revenue's website. http://www.inlandrevenue.gov.uk/stats/income tax/it t01 l.htm.

Islamic Mortgages

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to remove taxation barriers to Islamic mortgages; and if he will make a statement. [80491]

Ruth Kelly: The Government want to see consumers benefit from a wide choice and innovation in the financial services market. We are therefore keen to examine any perceived restrictions on product development that are brought to our attention.

We are now examining this issue in the context of the reforms under way as part of the modernisation of stamp duty as announced in the Budget on 17 April by

Gordon Brown. The review of stamp duty is an opportunity to iron out anomalies that exist under the current legislation. Our intention is to introduce legislation for the new stamp duty regime in Finance Bill 2003, and to implement the revised scheme late next year.

Budget Summary Costs

Dr. Fox: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what the cost to his Department was of sending leaflets and posters summarising the last Budget to *(a)* general practice surgeries and *(b)* other healthcare institutions; [80951]

(2) how many general practice surgeries have been sent leaflets summarising the last Budget. [80950]

Dawn Primarolo: The Treasury has, for many years, produced and distributed a summary of the Budget. The total cost of producing and distributing all Budget 2002 leaflets was met from within Departmental Expenditure Limits and amounted to approximately £208,000.

Within the total distribution, around 8,000 GPs' surgeries received summary leaflets. These and other healthcare institutions accounted for around one third of all leaflet recipients.

Life Expectancy

Mr. Webb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the local areas where the expectancy at birth of *(a)* a man and *(b)* a woman is less than 70 years; and if he will estimate in each case the number of *(i)* men and (ii) women who live in each area. [81048]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested is the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Colin Mowl to Mr. Steve Webb, dated 19 November 2002:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your question asking for a list of the local areas where the expectancy at birth of *(a)* a man and *(b)* a woman is less than 70 years; and to estimate in each case the number of *(i)* men and (ii) women who live in each area. I am replying in his absence. (81048)

The most recent available figures for life expectancy at birth by local authority in England and Wales are for the years 1999 to 2001. These show that Manchester was the only local authority for which male life expectancy at birth was less than 70 years (69.7 years). There were no areas with female life expectancy at birth lower than 70 years.

The estimated mid-year population of Manchester in 2001, based on the 2001 Census, was:

(i) 191,778 males

(ii) 201,130 females.

Local Government Funding

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many representatives his Department has received from Eddisbury constituency residents about local government funding in the last 12 months; and if he will make a statement on the arguments in those representations. [81264]

Mr. Boateng: The information requested is not available. Correspondence from members of the public is not recorded by Parliamentary constituency.

Mortgage Direct

Mr. Todd: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what representations he has received concerning the activities of Mortgage Direct. [80784]

Ruth Kelly: None. But if he has particular concerns, perhaps my hon. friend could write to me.

Office for National Statistics

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer on how many occasions Ministers in his Department have been consulted by National Statistics about proposals which impinge on Government policy as defined in the response of the Statistics Commission to the draft National Statistics Code of Practice in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [80414]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Matthew Taylor, dated 19 November 2002:

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your recent question concerning how many occasions Ministers have been consulted by National Statistics about proposals which impinge on Government policy as defined in the response of the Statistics Commission to the draft National Statistics Code of Practice in each of the last five years. (80414)

My responsibility for consulting Ministers on "proposals that impinge on government policy" is embodied within the "National Statistics Protocol on Consultation Arrangements between the National Statistician and UK Government Ministers" which came into effect on October 11th this year. Since that date I have not had occasion to consult Ministers under this Protocol.

As the Protocol indicates, a record of ministerial consultations will be kept and reported annually in the National Statistics Annual Report.

Public Finances

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent assessment he has made of the state of the public finances; and if he will make a statement. [81804]

Mr. Boateng: Consistent with the Code for Fiscal Stability, an interim forecast update will be provided in the pre-Budget report to be presented to Parliament on 27 November 2002.

Public Service Agreements

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he expects to receive the report from the National Audit Office on details on the methods used to validate systems in reporting on public service agreements. [80589]

Mr. Boateng: The methods used to validate systems are a matter for the National Audit Office.

Resource Costs

Mr. Lilley: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the resource cost of building *(a)* homes, *(b)* schools, *(c)* hospitals and *(d)* public utilities for an expansion of the population by one million. [80706]

Mr. Boateng: The cost of additional infrastructure investment needed to support an expansion of the population would depend upon a large number of variables. The Government takes into account all relevant factors in setting spending plans in biennial Spending Reviews.

Split Capital Investment Trusts

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions he has had with the Financial Services Authority regarding the collapse of the split capital investment trusts; and when the FSA will produce the results of its inquiry. [81036]

Ruth Kelly: The Treasury is in regular contact with the FSA on a wide range of issues. The FSA issued a policy statement on Split Capital Investment Trusts in May 2002. It will consult on changes to the listing rules in early 2003. It also has on-going investigations into individual cases.

Stability and Growth

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions he has had with his European counterparts regarding the future of the Stability and Growth Pact; and if he will make a statement. [80739]

Ruth Kelly: I refer the hon Member to my answer to him on 5 November 2002, *Official Report* column 211W.

Statistics

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions his Department has had with the Office of National Statistics regarding the accuracy of the statistics it provides; and if he is reviewing standards in the office. [80733]

Ruth Kelly: Treasury Ministers and officials have regular discussions with the National Statistician and other officials at the Office for National Statistics on a range of statistical issues. Under the Framework for National Statistics, responsibility for ensuring the accuracy of national statistics lies with the National Statistician, who keeps such standards under constant review. The National Statistics Code of Practice, which was officially launched earlier this year, states that the National Statistician will report annually on the quality of official statistics.

Tax Harmonisation (Private Pensions)

Mr. Webb: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the proposals by the European Union to harmonise the tax treatment of private pensions. [80923]

Ruth Kelly *[holding answer 18 November 2002]:* The Government are not aware of any such proposals.

Treasury Buildings (Air Conditioning)

Jane Griffiths: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the climate change impact will be of the use of HFC in the air conditioning system in the Treasury building in Great George Street. [81768]

Ruth Kelly: The Treasury building in Horse Guards Road is largely naturally ventilated, with limited use of air conditioning. With proper maintenance and disposal, the use of HFC will not have any impact on climate change.

Treasury IT System

Brian White: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps he has taken to review the security of the Department's IT system; and how many digital attacks there were on the Department's system in *(a)* October and *(b)* 2002. [80771]

Ruth Kelly: The Department has in place a BS/ISO 17799 compliance programme, and has recently undergone a CRAMM v.4 risk assessment, allowing us to review the effectiveness of our security controls. Several aspects of our office system have also been subjected to independent 'health-checks' in the past 12 months. The controls covering the departmental system's external connections are reviewed every six months by the national security authorities. There have been no incidents of digital attack in either *(a)* October, or *(b)* 2002, on the office system, however there was one incidence of digital attack on an external website that was under construction, discovered in June 2002.

TRANSPORT

Firefighters

14. **Dr. Julian Lewis:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what his policy is to protect transport users during industrial action by firefighters. [81336]

Mr. Darling: The Health & Safety Executive has worked with operators to assess the risk to rail services, including London Underground, and "considers the risks arising from a withdrawal of fire brigade cover can be adequately controlled by the industry without major effects to services".

Cross Rail

15. **Linda Perham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what recent representations he has received regarding the financing of the East London Crossrail project. [81337]

Mr Jamieson: My right hon. Friend and I regularly receive representations on the Crossrail project.

Piccadilly Station, Manchester

16. **Mr. Lloyd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what discussions he has had with the Strategic Rail Authority about train congestion at Piccadilly Station in Manchester. [81338]

Mr. Jamieson: The Strategic Rail Authority is currently consulting on a capacity utilisation policy, which seeks to make best use of the network as a whole.

In relation to Manchester, specifically, the SRA's strategic plan identifies proposals from the Greater Manchester capacity study as a scheme for further development.

Lewes-Uckfield Railway Line

17. **Norman Baker:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what recent assessment he has made of the advantages of reopening the Lewes-Uckfield railway line. [81339]

Mr. Jamieson: This has been considered by the Strategic Rail Authority. Restoration of the Lewes-Uckfield line is not required to meet the Authority's objectives. No provision was made for it in the Authority's objectives. No provision was made for it in the Authority's strategic plan, published in January 2002.

Bus Services

18. **Ms Drown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps are being taken to encourage joint ticketing and timetabling of bus companies. [81340]

Mr. Jamieson: The Government are committed to encouraging joint ticketing schemes between operators that will benefit bus users. The Director General of Fair Trading issued a new guideline in August, setting out what operators need to do to ensure that their ticketing schemes comply with the terms of the block exemption from the Competition Act 1998. The Office of Fair Trading is looking at the competition implications for co-ordinated timetabling of competing services. Officials from my Department are continuing to monitor the situation.

A6 Bypass

19. **Phil Sawford:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects the A6 Romwell/ Desborough bypass to be completed. [81341]

Mr. Jamieson: The contractual completion date for the A6 Rothwell and Desborough Bypass is August 2003.

Earlier completion would be a matter for the contractor.

Cycling Helmets

20. **Mr. Ben Chapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what he is doing to encourage greater use of cycling helmets. [81342]

Mr. Jamieson: In addition to our existing publicity material to promote the wearing of cycles helmets we have supported the Bicycle Helmet Initiative Trust to develop national guidelines to promote cycle helmet wearing. This has been distributed widely. We are also developing a cycle safety campaign for teenagers for launch in early 2003.

A34

21. **Dr. Evan Harris:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has for the re-surfacing of the A34 between Wendlebury and Peartree in Oxfordshire. [81343]

Mr. Jamieson: This section of the A34 is a concrete road. It has been identified as meeting the appropriate selection criteria for possible resurfacing with quieter materials, as announced on 17 October 2001. The Highways Agency has carried out surveys on this and other routes opened since 1988 to assess whether actual noise levels have turned out to be significantly higher than predicted at the time of their Public Inquiry. The Highways Agency are currently making their assessment. We hope to be able to announce conclusions later this year.

Liverpool-Euston Line

22. **Dr. Pugh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations his Department has received about the upgrading of the Liverpool-Euston line. [81344]

Mr. Jamieson: I have received a number of representations about the Strategic Rail Authority's proposed strategy for the west coast main line project, which includes plans for improvements in services between Liverpool and Euston.

Train Performance

23. **Mr. Hoban:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many meetings he has had since 1 January with train operating companies about train performance. [81345]

Mr. Jamieson: I, and other departmental Ministers, meet with train operating companies on a regular basis, as part of wider industry meetings and specifically to discuss their work.

Mr. Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many meetings he has had since he took office with train operating companies about train performance. [81444]

Mr. Jamieson: I, and other departmental Ministers, meet with train operating companies on a regular basis, as part of wider industry meetings and specifically to discuss their work.

New Airport (Rugby)

25. **Mr. Robathan:** To ask the Secretary of Transport what discussions he has had with the Environment Agency on consequences involving flooding if a new airport were to be built on the proposed site near Rugby. [81347]

Mr. Jamieson: The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs provided comments on the draft consultation document for the Midlands. The Environmental Agency has engaged in the consultation process. If the Midlands new site option was taken forward detailed assessment of environmental impacts, including flood risk, would be required as part of the planning process.

Train Operating Companies

26. **Mrs. Anne Campbell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport, what discussions he has had with the Strategic Rail Authority about poor service from the train operating companies. [81348]

Mr. Jamieson: Ministers and officials met with the SRA on a regular basis to discuss a wide range of topics including train performance.

Rail Subsidies

27. **Alan Simpson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the level of public subsidy to Railtrack and other train operators in the period since rail privatisation. [81349]

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the total level of public subsidy to rail services in the UK in the last financial year. [81346]

Mr. Jamieson: For five years after its privatisation in 1996, Railtrack received no public subsidy direct from the Government. However, the company's profitability was contingent on subsidy, because some 85 per cent. of its income came in access charges paid to it by train operating companies (TOCS), most of which did receive subsidy. Since 1 October 2001, Railtrack has received network grant direct from the Government to help fund its maintenance and renewals investment.

Details of annual levels of public subsidy to the rail industry in Great Britain are set out in Table 5.1 of "National Rail Trends", copies of which are in the Library. In 2001–02, total subsidy amounted to £1,826 million. The main elements of that were £731 million paid to TOCs, £306 million paid to passenger transport executives, £499 million paid to Railtrack and £185 million paid to London & Continental Railways.

Timetables and Ticketing

28. **Helen Jackson:** To ask the Secretary of State what progress he is making on integrating timetables and ticketing of public transport. [81350]

Mr. Jamieson: We are making good progress in this area. My Department assisted with the establishment of traveline and continues to provide support for this service. Traveline provides integrated, multi-modal public transport route and timetable information through a single national telephone number.

Transport Direct will build on the success of traveline. It will provide route, timetable and fare information for all modes of public and private transport and provide for the purchase of tickets. Transport Direct will initially be provided through an internet portal; the first version will be up and running by the end of 2003 as stated in our objectives in the 10-year plan.

We have also been working with other organisations to encourage integrated ticketing. One of these products is the PlusBus scheme which allows integration of zonal bus tickets on to national rail tickets. Sheffield is among the initial 35 stations where PlusBus will be available.

Rail Services (North-West)

29. **Andy Burnham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment his Department has made of the quality and coverage of rail services in the North West. [81351]

Mr. Jamieson: The Strategic Rail Authority reports on the quality and coverage of rail services in its annual report, "On Track" and "National Rail Trends".

M10

30. **Mr. McWalter:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to upgrade the M10 to provide a full motorway link to the A1(M). [81352]

Mr. Jamieson: The M10 motorway falls within the study area of the London to South Midlands Multi-Modal Study. This study is currently under way and is looking at long-term solutions to meet the passenger and freight transport needs within the area, including the existing difficulty of east-west travel. It is expected the study will report to regional planning bodies at the turn of this year. I would not want to prejudge the study recommendations at this stage.

10-year Plan

31. **Mr. Andrew Turner:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many meetings he has had with passengers' interest groups about the 10-year Plan. [81353]

33. **Mr. Swire:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many meetings he has had with passengers' interest groups about the 10-year Plan. [81355]

Mr. Jamieson: Ministers in this Department have regular meetings with a wide range of interest groups, many of whom represent passengers.

Traffic Reduction

32. **Simon Hughes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on his plans for traffic reduction. [81354]

Mr. Jamieson: A core aim of the Government's 10-year Plan for transport is to tackle the adverse effects of traffic, in particular congestion and pollution. There is no specific objective for reducing traffic, although we believe that, by 2010, the plan will have led to lower traffic growth than would otherwise have been the case.

Stagecoach

34. **Mr. Barnes:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the standard of bus services provided by Stagecoach. [81356]

Mr. Jamieson: Local authorities have the primary role in assessing whether bus service needs in their area are being met adequately by current provision. I understand there were some problems with Stagecoach services in the east Derbyshire area, but that these have now improved considerably.

Airport Expansion

35. **Mr. Prisk:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what representations he has received concerning airport expansion in the south-east. [81357]

Mr. Jamieson: We have received and continue to receive a huge number of responses and inquiries concerning the airports consultation. Ministers and officials have met a wide range of organisations including planning bodies, environmental groups and the aviation industry. A number of public exhibitions on the options have also been held.

Air Shows

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) how many accidents there have been at air shows in each of the last 10 years; and how many *(a)* fatalities and *(b)* injuries resulted from these; [80790]

(2) how many public air shows have been held in each of the last 10 years; and how many of these involved *(a)* vintage aircraft *(b)* former military planes. [80789]

Mr. Jamieson: The following table provides details of civilian air displays performed for the public since 1992. There were no injuries to members of th public over this period. All of the displays listed involved both vintage and ex-military aircraft.

Year	*Air displays*	*Accidents*	*Fatalities to crew*	*Serious injuries*	*Minor injuries*
1992	462	1	1	0	0
1993	438	0	0	0	0
1994	438	1	0	0	1
1995	370	2	1	0	0
1996	256	4	4	0	0
1997	338	2	0	0	0
1998	311	2	1	0	0
1999	294	1	0	0	0
2000	245	1	1	0	0
2001	165	2	3	0	0
2002	196	0	0	0	1
Total		16	11	0	2

Angina

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the review team of the DVLA will report on the outcome of its inquiry into the confusion caused by the wording of Question 2 on the H1 medical questionnaire about angina; and if he will make a statement. [80761]

Mr. Jamieson: The agency has completed its review of the wording of the angina question. It has been decided to make a change to the wording of the question and this will be introduced as soon as possible. In the meantime, applicants who declare that they suffer from angina provoked by driving are being contacted to confirm that they have answered the question appropriately before any licensing decision is taken.

Congestion Charging

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many car parking spaces are available to *(a)* employees of his Department and *(b)* visitors to his Department within the proposed Central London Road User Charging Zone. [81858]

Mr. Jamieson: Within the proposed central London charging zone there are:

(a) 19 car parking spaces available to employees of the Department, and

(b) 17 car parking spaces available to visitors to the Department.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the policy is of his Department in relation to the reimbursement of Central London road user charges incurred by its employees. [81838]

Mr. Jamieson: It is general departmental travel planning policy that staff should not use cars to commute to and from work. However, staff on official business who are required to drive their own vehicles, or hire vehicles, within the charging zone will be reimbursed.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the estimated cost is to his Department of the Central London Road User Charging Scheme for *(a)* 17 February 2003 to 31 March 2003, and *(b)* 1 April 2003 to 31 March 2004. [81877]

Mr. Jamieson: Any additional costs to my Department as a result of the congestion charging scheme will be just one element within wider costs which have to be met from budgets for official travelling and other costs.

Tonnage Tax

Mr. Ivan Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the UK-based shipping companies which have increased the number of UK ratings in their employment since the introduction of the tonnage tax. [80893]

Mr. Jamieson: This information is commercially confidential and is exempt from disclosure under Section 13 of Part II of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Arson (Buckinghamshire)

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many incidents of arson there were in *(a)* Chesham and Amersham and *(b)* Buckinghamshire in each year since January 1997. [81178]

Mr. Leslie: In 2000, the Fire Service in Buckinghamshire attended 1,263 fires where malicious or deliberate ignition was proved or suspected (these include fires which were recorded by the brigade as 'doubtful'. This compares to 1,138 such fires in 1999, 967 in 1998 and 926 in 1997. Incident data are not available below brigade area level. 2000 is the latest year for which data are available.

Bed and Breakfast Accommodation

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what *(a)* central and *(b)* departmental administrative expenditure went on organising bed and breakfast accommodation for homeless households in each of the last five years for which figures are available, broken down by local authority. [80544]

Mrs. Roche: Comprehensive information on local authorities' expenditure in relation to expenditure on bed and breakfast accommodation, including central and departmental allocations of associated administrative and welfare costs, is published by the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) in "Homelessness Statistics—Actuals". Copies of the latest report, for 2000–01, and those for earlier years are available in the House Library.

Congestion Charging

Mr. Chope: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many car parking spaces are available to *(a)* employees of his Department and *(b)* visitors to his Department within the proposed central London road user charging zone. [81859]

Mr. Leslie: Within the proposed central London charging zone there are:

(a) 41 car parking spaces available to employees of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister, and

(b) 14 car parking spaces available to visitors to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the policy is of his Department in relation to the reimbursement of central London road user charges incurred by its employees. [81839]

Mr. Leslie: It is general departmental travel planning policy that staff should not use cars to commute to and from work. However, staff on official business who are required to drive their own vehicles, or hire vehicles, within the charging zone will be reimbursed.

Essex and Suffolk Haven Gateway Initiative

Bob Russell: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will give recognition to the Essex and Suffolk Haven Gateway initiative; and what financial and other support the Government will provide. [80755]

Mr. Raynsford: As I indicated to the right hon. Member for Suffolk Coastal (Mr. Gummer) on 17 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 343W, I recognise that the Haven Gateway Partnership has an important role. The East of England Development Agency has allocated £125,000 to support the partnership this year.

Fire Service

Mr. Edward Davey: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the cost to the Government has been of *(a)* maintained and *(b)* storage of Bedford self-propelled pumps since the Auxiliary Fire Service was disbanded; and if he will make a statement. [81699]

Mr. Leslie: The vehicles are held at Marchington and the costs of the site are shown in the following table:

Costs of Marchington since 1991

Year	Rent	Storage costs	Maintained costs	Income[1]	Total
1991–92[2]	326,693	Included in rent	502,441	—	829,134
1992–93	1,476,890	301,045	708,200	—	2,486,135
1993–94	1,183,128	237,870	832,944	—	2,253,942
1994–95	1,459,751	204,928	685,438	—	2,350,117
1995–96	1,191,498	195,845	635,924	—	2,023,267
1996–97	1,308,115	188,128	558,411	—	2,054,654
1997–98	1,388,300	144,076	512,549	—	2,044,925
1998–99	1,410,773	156,788	562,350	—	2,129,911
1999–2000	1,460,324	131,272	692,557	—	2,284,153
2000–01	1,490,469	178,784	881,139	—	2,550,392
2001–02	1,339,244	243,765	1,144,343	-800,000	1,927,352

[1] In July 2001 management of the EFS stockpile reverted to Departmental management and income is now shown separately.
[2] Part Year

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many *(a)* full-time and *(b)* retained firemen are on the strength of each fire brigade. [82013]

Mr. Leslie: The strength of firefighters in each fire authority area in England and Wales at 31 March 2002 is shown in the table:

Strength of wholetime[1] and retained[2] fire authority staff in England and Wales at 31 March 2002[3]

	Wholetime	Retained
Avon	651	159
Bedfordshire and Luton	324	118
Buckinghamshire	304	143
Cambridgeshire	274	304
Cheshire	626	146
Cleveland	610	66
Cornwall	183	407
County Durham and Darlington	412	151
Cumbria	274	372
Derbyshire	482	226
Devon	538	651
Dorset	298	289
East Sussex	423	197
Essex	948	382
Gloucestershire	226	261
Greater Manchester	2,148	26
Hampshire	770	567
Hereford and Worcester	352	289
Hertfordshire	570	208
Humberside	720	270
Isle of Wight	59	148
Isles of Scilly	10	33
Kent	951	467
Lancashire	1,002	268
Leicestershire	476	139
Lincolnshire	192	420
London	5,913	0
Merseyside	1,317	0
Mid and West Wales	499	662
Norfolk	307	430
North Wales	289	473
North Yorkshire	363	321
Northamptonshire	292	231
Northumberland	208	162
Nottinghamshire	576	205
Oxfordshire	239	232
Royal Berkshire	413	136
Shropshire	206	252
Somerset	181	345
South Wales	957	363
South Yorkshire	923	34
Staffordshire	471	308
Suffolk	252	348
Surrey	686	103
Tyne and Wear	1,009	18
Warwickshire	282	144
West Midlands	2,028	7
West Sussex	393	259
West Yorkshire	1,660	160
Wiltshire	221	280

[1] In full-time equivalents
[2] In 24 hour units of cover
[3] Provisional
Note:
Figures have been rounded to the nearest whole number.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what information he collects on the relative manpower to risk ratios of different fire brigades; and what guidelines he offers to brigades on determining manpower levels. [82014]

Mr. Leslie: HM Fire Service Inspectorate collects information for each fire authority on staffing levels and on hectarage of each category of fire risk. However, it is not possible to make a direct correlation between the two as fire cover is provided on a strategic basis.

Guidance which fire authorities use when considering staffing levels is contained in the "Report of the Joint Committee on Standards of Fire Cover", circulated under cover of Fire Service Circular 4/1985, a copy of which is in the Libraries of the House. This report recommends national standards for attendance times, the number of fire appliances and crewing levels. Fire authorities use a formula to determine what staffing levels they require to meet these standards, taking account of local circumstances. HM Inspectorate examines these levels as part of its regular inspection of brigades.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many emergency call-outs were received by each fire brigade in the last year for which information is available. [82015]

Mr. Leslie: The number of emergency call-outs attended by UK local authority fire brigades for the last year for which data are available is recorded in the table.

Incidents attended by brigade area, 2000[1]

	Total incidents	*Fires All fires*	*Primary fires*[2]	*Secondary fires*	*Chimney fires*	*False alarms*	*Special services*[3]
United Kingdom	1,134,388	476,347	219,535	241,357	15,455	460,466	197,575
England and Wales	981,573	399,437	192,239	197,253	9,945	396,913	185,223
England	920,968	368,537	179,842	179,753	8,942	377,950	174,481
England—non-Met	494,149	196,655	101,497	86,934	8,224	204,765	92,729
Avon	18,410	7,330	4,372	2,837	121	8,070	3,010
Bedfordshire	8,180	3,617	2,070	1,485	62	3,239	1,324
Berkshire	13,742	4,755	2,589	2,054	112	6,796	2,191
Buckinghamshire	10,466	4,616	2,605	1,888	123	4,325	1,525
Cambridgeshire	12,707	4,156	2,374	1,678	104	6,412	2,139
Cheshire	14,521	6,975	3,020	3,778	177	5,374	2,172
Cleveland	16,023	8,256	3,199	5,028	29	5,759	2,008
Cornwall	6,332	2,656	1,405	848	403	2,197	1,479
Cumbria	7,778	3,524	1,724	1,538	262	3,349	905
Derbyshire	14,221	5,038	2,573	2,244	221	6,488	2,695
Devon	17,278	6,089	3,291	2,314	484	7,102	4,087
Dorset	10,219	3,723	1,838	1,646	239	4,547	1,949
Durham	11,434	5,978	2,411	3,317	250	3,916	1,540
East Sussex	14,290	4,845	3,013	1,603	229	5,720	3,725
Essex	25,481	9,405	4,776	4,474	155	10,015	6,061
Gloucestershire	7,300	2,853	1,664	929	260	2,654	1,793
Hampshire	22,920	9,116	4,175	4,602	339	9,266	4,538
Hereford and Worcs	9,174	3,725	1,951	1,514	260	3,469	1,980
Hertfordshire	13,581	5,296	3,081	2,127	88	6,234	2,051
Humberside	16,895	8,369	3,360	4,819	190	5,658	2,868
Isle of Wight	1,966	589	372	172	45	753	624
Kent	25,817	10,239	5,581	4,326	332	10,519	5,059
Lancashire	26,648	12,251	5,633	6,451	167	10,728	3,669
Leicestershire	13,806	5,386	2,900	2,346	140	5,771	2,649
Lincolnshire	7,252	3,134	1,824	1,105	205	2,334	1,784
Norfolk	9,403	3,889	2,267	1,312	310	4,043	1,471
North Yorkshire	10,784	3,575	2,082	1,153	340	4,131	3,078
Northamptonshire	10,047	4,681	2,586	1,943	152	3,833	1,533
Northumberland	5,174	2,655	1,109	1,339	207	1,876	643
Nottinghamshire	17,589	8,067	4,272	3,620	175	6,714	2,808
Oxfordshire	10,264	3,247	2,015	999	233	5,585	1,432
Shropshire	6,815	2,960	1,498	1,209	253	2,294	1,561
Somerset	7,754	2,740	1,614	745	381	3,306	1,708
Staffordshire	14,438	6,745	3,268	3,233	244	5,378	2,315
Suffolk	7,994	2,813	1,630	979	204	3,590	1,591
Surrey	15,569	4,099	2,348	1,623	128	8,282	3,188
Warwickshire	7,943	3,046	1,498	1,443	105	3,566	1,331
West Sussex	15,214	3,689	2,033	1,428	228	7,260	4,265
Wiltshire	8,688	2,516	1,470	780	266	4,203	1,969
Isles of Scilly	32	12	6	5	1	9	11
England(Met	426,819	171,882	78,345	92,819	718	173,185	81,752
Greater Manchester	59,675	29,201	14,953	14,189	59	24,217	6,257
Merseyside	37,808	21,278	8,406	12,810	62	12,625	3,905
South Yorkshire	24,293	12,135	5,116	6,844	175	9,168	2,990
Tyne and Wear	26,660	14,858	5,996	8,821	41	9,469	2,333
West Midlands	59,807	25,397	12,462	12,855	80	24,766	9,644
West Yorkshire	42,128	20,791	9,668	10,908	215	17,368	3,969
Greater London	176,448	48,222	21,744	26,392	86	75,572	52,654
Wales	60,605	30,900	12,397	17,500	1,003	18,963	10,742
North Wales	13,706	5,535	2,429	2,642	464	5,153	3,018
Mid and West Wales	16,991	8,623	3,931	4,309	383	4,917	3,451

Incidents attended by brigade area, 2000[1]

	Total incidents	Fires All fires	Primary fires[2]	Secondary fires	Chimney fires	False alarms	Special services[3]
South Wales	29,908	16,742	6,037	10,549	156	8,893	4,273
Northern Ireland	34,488	21,156	7,093	11,672	2,391	11,774	1,558
Scotland[4]	118,327	55,754	20,203	32,432	3,119	51,779	10,794
Strathclyde	60,265	29,641	10,235	18,920	486	25,881	4,743
Highland and Islands	4,980	2,319	644	657	1,018	2,127	534
Grampian	8,169	3,737	1,669	1,537	531	3,283	1,149
Tayside	9,169	4,522	1,645	2,644	233	3,828	819
Lothian and Borders	21,413	9,154	3,638	5,183	333	10,193	2,066
Fife	6,923	3,095	1,119	1,829	147	3,177	651
Central	5,204	2,294	834	1,374	86	2,552	358
Dumfries and Galloway	2,204	992	419	288	285	738	474

[1] 2000 fire incident figures are provisional
[2] Including additional "late" call and heat and smoke damage incidents
[3] Special service incidents relate to financial year 2000–01
[4] Scottish special service data supplied by the Scottish Executive

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what proportion of *(a)* the population and *(b)* the land area of each fire brigade are covered by *(i)* retained and *(ii)* full-time firemen. [82016]

Mr. Leslie: Statutory responsibility for the provision of fire services rests locally with the fire authority. Information on the land area or population served by individual fire stations is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. Fire stations may be staffed by whole-time, retained firefighters or combination of the two. Fire cover is provided on a strategic basis because it is recognised that the appliances at any individual fire station are not the only resources available to that locality.

Firefighters (Buckinghamshire)

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many *(a)* full-time and *(b)* full-time equivalent firefighters there were in *(i)* Chesham and Amersham and (ii) Buckinghamshire in each of the last five years. [81170]

Mr. Leslie: Statutory responsibility for the provision of fire services rests locally with the fire authority, in this case the Buckinghamsire, and Milton Keynes Fire Authority. The readily available information is as follows.

Amersham and Chestham

	Firefighter posts		Firefighter posts	
	Wholetime	Retained	Wholetime	Retained
31 December 1997	17	12	0	12
31 March 1999	14	12	3	12
31 March 2000	14	12	0	12
31 March 2001	14	12	0	12
31 March 2002	14	12	0	12

Buckinghamshire

Firefighter strength

	Wholetime[1]	Retained[2]
31 December 1997	300	156
31 March 1999	305	152
31 March 2000	307	151
31 March 2001	292	152
31 March 2002	304	143

[1] In full-time equivalents
[2] In units of 24 hour cover

Local Authority Performance Assessments

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister whether democratically elected members of an authority have a right to see the inspection team's report following a comprehensive performance assessment of a local authority while awaiting the identification of the final assessment category. [80591]

Mr. Raynsford: The Audit Commission had been charged with developing and implementing the methodology for the Comprehensive Performance Assessment, including a Corporate Assessment. Corporate Assessment tests how the council has established its aims and priorities and how they are succeeding in delivering them.

Once completed, the Corporate Assessment report will be a public document. Prior to publication it is shared with each council, as a confidential draft, in order to rectify any inaccuracies, to permit the authority to provide further evidence or to seek clarification on inspection findings before the report is finalised. All Corporate Assessment reports are then subject to an Audit Commission quality assurance process before they are completed and published. In respecting the confidential nature of the draft, it is a matter for each authority how widely it is shared with officers and elected members.

Local Government Finance

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what level of revenue support grant has been received by the Isle of Wight Council in each of the last five years at 2002 prices *(a)* in total and *(b)* per head of population; and what the anticipated figures would be for 2003–04 under each of his consultative options for reform of the local government finance formula using Treasury inflation assumptions. [80986]

Mr. Raynsford: The tables show the amounts of Revenue Support Grant and redistributed national non-domestic rates, and the total of these two items, for the Isle of Wight in £ millions and in 3s per head for the period 1998–99 to 2002–03.

The figures are in real terms, based on the GDP deflator, with 2002–03 as the base year. The figures are based on the amount of grant actually received by the Isle of Wight for the year concerned, and so do not take into account any changes in function or responsibility.

Figures for 2003–04 under each of the consultative options could only be provided at disproportionate cost. In all events this would not give an accurate projection for 2003–4 as the consultative options were illustrated by reference to 2002–3 and did not incorporate data changes for 2003–4 which were not then Available.

Table 1: Grant in real terms in £ million

	RSG	*NNDR*	*RSF plus NNDR*
1998–99	49.110	32.414	81.253
1999–2000	48.669	34.399	83.068
2000–01	48.753	38.293	87.046
2001–02	53.653	36.970	90.623
2002–03	48.409	39.822	88.231

Table 2: Grant per head in real terms in £

	RSG	*NNDR*	*RSG plus NNDR*
1998–99	391	258	650
1999–2000	387	273	660
2000–01	384	302	685
2001–02	418	288	707
2002–03	374	308	682

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what impact changes in the local government formula grant will have on public services in *(a)* Chesham and Amersham and *(b)* Buckinghamshire. [81169]

Mr. Raynsford: We will announce the new system for distributing formula grant, including detailed grant allocations for individual authorities, at the time of the provisional local government finance settlement which we expect to be around the start of December. Once the Government have allocated its grant, decisions about budgets and services are primarily for local councils to make. However, we have already guaranteed that no authority will face a cut in grant next year on a like for like basis, and we hope to do better than that when we announce the actual floors and ceiling scheme as part of the provisional settlement.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what impact changes in the local government formula grant will have on public services delivered by *(a)* Chiltern District Council and *(b)* Buckinghamshire County Council. [81173]

Mr. Raynsford: We will announce the new system for distributing formula grant, including detailed grant allocations for individual authorities, at the time of the provisional local government finance settlement which we expect to be around the start of December. Once the Government has allocated its grant, decisions about budgets and services are primarily for local councils to make. However, we have already guaranteed that we will use grant "floors" to ensure that no authority will face a cut in grant next year on a like for like basis, and we hope to do better than that when we announce the actual floors and ceilings scheme as part of the provisional settlement.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what proportion of spending by *(a)* Buckinghamshire county council and *(b)* Chiltern district council *(i)* has been financed by council tax payers in each year since 1 January 1996 and (ii) is to be financed by council tax payers in 2002–03. [81179]

Mr. Raynsford: The proportions of revenue expenditure financed from the council tax for Buckinghamshire county council and Chiltern district council in the financial years 1995–96 to 2002–03 are set out in the following table:

Income from council tax as a percentage of spending

Year	*Buckinghamshire county council*[1]	*Chiltern district council*
1995–96	27	51
1996–97	28	57
1997–98	31	67
1998–99	34	65
1999–2000	34	60
2001–01	35	62
2001–02[2]	34	61
2002–03[2]	36	62

[1] For 1997–98 onwards this excludes the area of Milton Keynes borough council, which became unitary from 1 April 1997.
[2] 2001–02 and 2002–03 are budgeted figures; 1995–96 to 2001–01 are outturn figures.
Source:
1995–96 to 2000–01 Revenue Summary Returns.
2001–02 and 2002–03 Budget Estimate Returns.

Parish Clerks

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many parish clerks are employed in England. [80628]

Mr. Leslie: The information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate costs.

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what guidance he has issued on the training of parish clerks. [80629]

Mr. Leslie: We have not issued any guidance on the training of parish clerks, although the National Training Strategy has introduced a training package for parish clerks, prepared by the Countryside Agency and NALC. The Government strongly support this initiative and are contributing £2 million over three years.

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what assessment he has made of the remuneration of parish clerks. [80630]

Mr. Leslie: We have not made any assessment of the remuneration of parish clerks.

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what assessment he has made of change in nature of the work of parish clerks. [80631]

Mr. Leslie: We recognise the implications that the new measures to strengthen the parish tier of local

government have for parish clerks. The new Training Strategy which has been prepared by the Countryside Agency and NALC, to which the Government is contributing £2 million over three years, reflects the current role of clerks.

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what assessment he has made of the parish clerk workforce in terms of *(a)* age, *(b)* gender and *(c)* ethnicity. [80635]

Mr. Leslie: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has not made any assessment of the parish clerk workforce recently. However, research undertaken in 1991 for the then Department of Environment sampled 1,000 parish councils in England. The research found that 59 per cent. of all clerks were female and employed part-time. However, this proportion decreases with the increase in the size of the council. The research found that in councils for parishes with a population of over 10,000 only 25 per cent. were female.

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what assessment he has made of the workload of parish clerks. [80636]

Mr. Leslie: We have not made any assessment of the current workload of parish clerks generally, although in our consultation document "Quality Town and Parish Councils", published on 7 November 2001, we proposed a basis for assessing their competence.

Parking Fines

Clive Efford: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the income was for each local authority in London in each of the last five years from *(a)* parking meters, *(b)* car park charges, and *(c)* parking enforcement notices. [81008]

Mr. Leslie: It is not possible to separately identify the income from parking meters, car park charges and parking enforcement notices. The total income reported by local authorities in the years 1996–97 to 2000–01 is presented in the table.

Income from parking for the London authorities

£000

	1996–97	1997–98	1998–99	1999–2000	2000–01
City of London	10,948	11,082	12,702	12,815	12,213
Inner London boroughs					
Camden	16,975	18,647	21,286	24,535	25,742
Greenwich	3,029	4,706	5,570	4,797	5,066
Hackney	3,643	4,790	3,473	4,617	4,946
Hammersmith and Fulham	9,313	11,043	13,194	14,633	21,815
Islington	4,170	4,584	5,793	5,812	7,234
Kensington and Chelsea	22,756	24,820	25,946	30,434	30,836
Lambeth	2,676	2,983	5,476	10,663	9,817
Lewisham	1,145	1,149	1,338	1,616	2,563
Southwark	2,801	3,815	4,749	6,209	6,303
Tower Hamlets	3,708	6,455	7,469	11,847	9,825
Wandsworth	4,900	5,452	6,160	8,731	11,938
Westminster	91,572	101,919	76,794	88,020	89,397
Total inner London boroughs	166,688	190,363	177,248	211,914	225,482
Outer London boroughs					
Barking and Degenham	863	932	935	1,010	990
Barnet	2,528	2,421	3,060	3,893	3,815
Bexley	2,293	2,541	2,618	2,721	2,874
Brent	2,515	3,658	4,052	5,269	5,859
Bromley	4,554	5,026	5,404	5,945	6,074
Croydon	9,053	9,883	10,148	13,297	14,115
Ealing	2,552	3,042	3,120	4,268	5,619
Enfield	3,468	3,606	3,777	3,682	4,666
Haringey	2,039	2,679	4,129	4,228	5,438
Harrow	2,481	3,104	3,408	4,363	5,051
Havering	3,207	3,535	3,478	3,729	3,687
Hillingdon	2,530	2,676	3,192	3,504	4,442
Hounslow	2,621	2,879	3,339	3,407	4,676
Kingston upon Thames	4,450	4,398	4,775	5,295	6,193
Merton	1,900	2,258	2,365	2,714	3,104
Newham	1,934	2,168	2,542	3,093	3,930
Redbridge	2,147	1,852	2,312	2,857	3,346
Richmond upon Thames	5,039	5,963	5,561	6,330	7,076
Sutton	2,877	3,102	3,484	3,746	3,865
Waltham Forest	2,573	2,908	3,173	3,677	3,975
Total outer London boroughs	61,624	68,631	74,872	87,028	98,795
Total London	239,260	270,076	264,822	311,757	336,490

Source:
Revenue Summary Returns

Public Service Agreements (Chesham and Amersham)

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many public service agreements have been entered into with local authorities covering the Chesham and Amersham constituency; and if he will make a statement. [81176]

Mr. Leslie: The Government have entered into one local public service agreement covering the Chesham and Amersham constituency. This agreement is with Buckinghamshire county council, with the four district councils in Buckinghamshire being joint signatories to the agreement. The text of this agreement can be found at http://www.local-regions.odpm.gov.uk/lpsa/2001/full.htm

CABINET OFFICE

Congestion Charging

Mr. Chope: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how many car parking spaces are available to *(a)* employees of his Department and *(b)* visitors to his Department within the proposed Central London Road User Charging Zone. [81864]

Mr. Alexander: There are 46 allocated parking spaces available for use by employees of the Cabinet Office.

In addition there are currently 18 parking spaces which are for the use of visitors to the Department, for the parking of ministerial cars and for operational purposes.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what the estimated cost is to his Department of the Central London Road User Charging Scheme for *(a)* 17 February 2003 to 31 March 2003, and 1 April 2003 to 31 March 2004. [81883]

Mr. Alexander: Any additional costs to my Department as a result of the congestion charging scheme will be just one element within wider costs which have to be met from budgets for official travelling and other costs.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what the policy is of his Department in relation to the reimbursement of Central London road user charges incurred by its employees. [81844]

Mr. Alexander: All civil servants are responsible for payment of their own every day home to office travel costs. The introduction of a Central London Road User charge will not affect this basic condition of service.

PRIME MINISTER

Lord Chancellor (Pension Schemes)

Mr. Heald: To ask the Prime Minister whether the Lord Chancellor is entitled to be a member of *(a)* the Judicial Pensions Scheme and *(b)* the Ministerial Pensions Scheme; and if he will make a statement as to how the two schemes inter-relate in respect of the Lord Chancellor. [81896]

The Prime Minister: The Judicial Pensions Act 1981 provides lump sum benefits for the Lord Chancellor on leaving office or in the event of the Lord Chancellor's death in service, and also provides for pensions for his dependants.

There is no Ministerial Pension Scheme. The Parliamentary Pension Scheme provides pension benefits to Members of Parliament, Ministers and Officeholders. The Lord Chancellor is not entitled to membership of this scheme.

Provision for the Lord Chancellor's pension is made in the Lord Chancellor's Pension Act 1832 and the Parliamentary and Other Pensions Act 1972 as amended.

Official Definitions

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Prime Minister whether Her Majesty's Government has a uniform definition of rural and urban. [81894]

The Prime Minister: There is no unique approach to defining urban or rural areas. Indeed many areas exhibit characteristics of both.

However, definitions are needed to target programmes for urban and rural areas and for statistical purposes. In these cases, urban is defined as 'built-up settlements with a minimum population of 1,000 and a minimum land area of 20 hectares'. And the Countryside Agency has an existing methodology for defining rural areas; work is currently under way across Departments to refine that methodology.

SCOTLAND

Congestion Charging

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland how many car parking spaces are available to *(a)* employees of her Department and *(b)* visitors to her Department within the proposed entral London road user charging zone. [81865]

Mrs. Liddell: My department has no employee or visitors car parking spaces within the proposed central London charging zone. Scotland Office ministerial drivers have access to Whitehall parking permits as do any employees requiring these for essential business use.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what the policy is of her Department in relation to the reimbursement of central London road user charges incurred by its employees. [81845]

Mrs. Liddell: All civil servants are responsible for payment of their own everyday home to office travel costs. The introduction of a central London road user charge will not affect this basic condition of service.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland what the estimated cost is to her Department of the central London road user charging scheme for *(a)* 17 February 2003 to 31 March 2003, and *(b)* 1 April 2003 to 31 March 2004. [81884]

Mrs. Liddell: My Department has made no estimate of any additional costs resulting from the congestion charging scheme in central London since any that do arise will, necessarily, be very limited.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Congestion Charging

Mr. Chope: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, how many car parking spaces are available to *(a)* employees of her Department and *(b)* visitors to her Department within the proposed Central London Road User Charging Zone. [81852]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Lord Chancellor's Department has *(a)* a total of 48 bays available to its employees, and *(b)* one space permanently allocated to visitors within the Central London Road User Charging Zone.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, what the estimated cost is to her Department of the Central London Road User Charging Scheme for *(a)* 17 February 2003 to 31 March 2003, and *(b)* 1 April 2003 to 31 March 2004. [81870]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Lord Chancellor's Department estimates, based on average usage of departmental pool cars, that the figures for *(a)* 17 February 2003 to 31 March 2002 will be £620 and *(b)* 1 April 2003 to 31 March 2004 would be £4,800.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, what the policy is of her Department in relation to the reimbursement of Central London road user charges incurred by its employees. [81892]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Lord Chancellor's Department is currently formulating a policy on congestion charging.

TREASURY

Congestion Charging

Mr. Chope: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what the policy is of his Department in relation to the reimbursement of central London road user charges incurred by its employees; [81891]

(2) what the estimated cost is to his Department of the central London road user charging scheme for *(a)* 17 February 2003 to 31 March 2003, and *(b)* 1 April 2003 to 31 March 2004; [81871]

(3) how many car parking spaces are available to *(a)* employees of his Department and *(b)* visitors to his Department within the proposed central London road user charging zone. [81851]

Ruth Kelly: The Treasury has 46 car parking spaces, which are available for employees and visitors according to need. It reimburses staff for reasonable expenses legitimately incurred on official business. The scheme is not expected to make any detectable difference to the total amount paid. No numerical estimate of the cost has been made.

Immigration

Mr. Lilley: To ask Mr Chancellor of the Exchequer what impact he estimates the inflow of immigrants to this country will have on the levels of pay of *(a)* unskilled and *(b)* semi-skilled workers. [80705]

Ruth Kelly: To the extent that immigration were to add proportionately less to some skill groups than others, it would tend to raise their relative wage rates. If immigration did not change the skill composition of the labour force or productivity, it should have no lasting effect on either absolute or relative rates of pay.

Nevertheless research in the UK suggests that, if anything, migrants have had a positive impact on the wage levels of native workers among both groups. Migrants have contributed to economic growth, productivity and the public finances. Work-related immigration schemes in the UK are targeted to meet the needs of sectors where there are skills and labour shortages (for example the seasonal agricultural workers scheme), and are developed in conjunction with both sides of industry.

WALES

Congestion Charging

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales how many car parking spaces are available to *(a)* employees of his Department and *(b)* visitors to his Department within the proposed Central London Road User Charging Zone. [81862]

Peter Hain: Within the proposed central London charging zone my Department has a total of six parking spaces which are available to employees, visitors and official cars.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what the policy is of his Department in relation to the reimbursement of Central London road user charges incurred by its employees. [81842]

Peter Hain: All civil servants are responsible for payment of their own every day home to office travel costs. The introduction of a Central London Road User charge will not affect this basic condition of service. However, staff on official business who are required to drive their own vehicles, or hire vehicles, within the charging zone will be reimbursed for any charge they incur.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what the estimated cost is to his Department of the Central London Road User Charging Scheme for *(a)* 17 February 2003 to 31 March 2003, and *(b)* 1 April 2003 to 31 March 2004. [81881]

Peter Hain: Any additional costs to my Department as a result of the congestion charging scheme will be just one element within wider costs which have to be met from budgets for official travelling and other costs.

HEALTH

Abortion

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what percentage of NHS funded abortions occurred within *(a)* 9 weeks, *(b)* 9–12 weeks and *(c)* 13–19 weeks gestation of pregnancy in each of the last five years, broken down by authority of residence in England and Wales; [80399]

(2) what the *(a)* mean and *(b)* modal length of time between referral and an abortion was when a patient had to wait; in each of the last five years for which figures are available, broken down by health authority boundaries in England and Wales. [80400]

Ms Blears: The information requested has been placed in the Library.

Information on how long a patient had to wait between referral and an abortion is not collected centrally. As part of the sexual health and HIV strategy implementation action plan, the Department will be developing an abortion waiting time performance indicator and undertaking an audit of abortion waiting times and commissioning policies. From 2003, primary care trusts (PCTs) will work towards the national standard that women who meet the legal requirements should have access to an abortion within three weeks of the first appointment with referring doctor. £1 million is being allocated to a number of PCTs this financial year to help improve access to abortion services and reduce waiting times.

Adoption (Homosexual Couples)

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the adoption of children by homosexual couples; what assessment he has made of research into whether it provides a stable foundation for the raising of children; and what assessment he has made of possible gender confusion in children that are adopted by homosexual couples. [81067]

Jacqui Smith: The Adoption and Children Act 2002, which amends the Adoption Act 1976, provides that those who will be eligible to apply to adopt in the future are married couples, single people and two people (whether of different sexes or the same sex) living as partners in an enduring family relationship.

Under the existing Adoption Act 1976, single people adopt, regardless of sexual orientation, but only married couples may adopt jointly. It is open for one umarried partner to adopt a child and for the other to obtain parental responsibility by applying for a residence order in respect of the child. This denies the child the permanence and security of having two parents.

Enabling unmarried couples to apply to adopt jointly will widen the pool of potential adoptive parents, thereby ensuring that more vulnerable children will have the chance of the family life that adoption can bring. It will also allow the child to have a legal relationship with both parents, rather than just one, and therefore will increase the stability and security for the child.

In order to be approved as adoptive parents, any couple is required to undergo a stringent assessment process carried out by an adoption agency over a period of several months. The assessment process will include rigorous scrutiny of the stability of the relationship and their suitability to bring up children in that they can provide a loving family environment for a child. Ultimately the court will decide whether or not to make the adoption order.

Recognising the strongly held views for and against same-sex parenting, the Government has sought to draw conclusions from the various studies, which have been conducted and published in academic journals.

No reliable research to date has identified significant differences between lesbian and gay parents and their heterosexual counterparts, or between the children raised by those groups.

A number of studies have examined gender-role behaviour among children of lesbian mothers. The studies did not find any differences between children of lesbian and heterosexual mothers in toy preferences, activities, interests or occupational choices relevant to sex-role conventions. Details of the studies cited may be found in the letter from my noble Friend, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State (Lord Hunt of Kings Heath) to Lord Brennan of 20 June 2002, copies of which are available in the House of Commons Library.

The Government's objective through changing the law to allow unmarried couples to adopt jointly is to increase the number of children who have the opportunity, through adoption, to grow up as part of a loving, stable and permanent family.

Child Performances

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Health under what circumstances employers are required to obtain a licence to allow children to take part in a performance; and what the maximum length of time is that a child is allowed to take part in *(a)* rehearsals and *(b)* performances *(i)* per day and (ii) per year, where a licence is required for the child's performance; and what is the minimum number of hours education a child must undergo on school days when taking part in a performance. [81753]

Jacqui Smith: The circumstances governing the issue of child performance licences are contained in the Children (Performances) Regulations 1968. In summary, an employer must obtain a licence for every performance in which a child is to take part unless the child will take part in no more than three performances and neither the child nor anyone on their behalf will receive payment in respect of the performance. The times allowed for a child to take part in a rehearsal or performance varies according to whether the performance is to be broadcast or recorded or not. If the performance is not to be broadcast or recorded, a child may not take part in a rehearsal or performance on more than six days in any period of seven days, nor may she or he take part in any rehearsal or performance if the entire production, including intervals, exceeds three and a half hours or of his or her part or appearances exceeds two and a half hours. She or he may not take part in more than one performance on any school day unless granted absence from school.

For children taking part in broadcast or recorded performances the chart identifies the time limits.

There is no limit to the number of days in a year on which a child may perform. This is decided on an individual basis for each child with account being taken of their health, welfare, general wellbeing and education.

Daily working allowances and requirements of children taking part in broadcast and recorded performances

Age of child	*Maximum number of hours permitted at the place of performance or rehearsal*	*Earliest and latest permitted times at that place*	*Maximum period of continuous performance or rehearsal*	*Maximum number of hours performance or rehearsal*	*Minimal intervals for meals and rest*	*Minimum number of hours education on school days if being privately taught*[1]
9 or over	9.5	7.00 am to 7.00 pm	1 hour	4 hours	If present at the place of performance or rehearsal for more than four consecutive hours two, one of which must be at least an hour and the other at least 15 minutes. If at present at place of performance or rehearsal for more than eight consecutive hours three, two of which must each be at least an hour and the others at least 15 minutes	3
5 but under 9	7.5	9.00 am to 4.30 pm	45 minutes	3 hours	If present at the place of performance or rehearsal for more than three and a half consecutive hours two, one of which must be at least one hour and the other at least 15 minutes. If present at the place of performance or rehearsal for more than eight consecutive hours three, two of which must each be at least an hour and the others at least 15 minutes	3
Under 5	5	9.30 am to 4.30 pm	30 minutes	2 hours	Any time during which the child is not taking part in a performance or rehearsal must be used for meals, rest, and recreation	—

[1] The time required for tuition, three hours per normal school day, may be aggregated over a four week period, or if engaged for less than four weeks for that period, provided that a child receives at least six hours tuition per week and no more than five hours in any one day

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what *(a)* statutory regulations and *(b)* guidelines issued to local authorities cover the granting of licences to employers for child performances; and what the *(i)* recommended, (ii) average and (iii) range of response times are for local authorities in the granting of licences to employers for child performances were in the last year for which figures are available. [81754]

Jacqui Smith: The Children (Performances) Regulations 1968, as amended govern the issue of child performance licences. Licences must be issued within 21 days of receipt of a complete application. Figures are not collected centrally on child employment licensing.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many licences were *(a)* granted to and *(b)* applied for by employers for child performances in each of the past three years. [81761]

Jacqui Smith: The figures requested are not collected centrally.

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent research he has carried out into the current arrangements for licensing child performances; and if he will place copies in the Library. [81762]

Jacqui Smith: The Government have not conducted research into the arrangements for child performance licensing.

Continuing Care

Paul Farrelly: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many people are receiving NHS-funded continuing care in *(a)* NHS hospitals and *(b)* nursing homes in each strategic health authority area in the UK; [80489]

(2) how many continuing care assessments have been made each year since 1996 in the area of the former North Staffordshire health authority; and of those, how many have been deemed *(a)* eligible and *(b)* not eligible to receive NHS-funded continuing care. [80487]

Jacqui Smith: The information requested is not collected centrally. Data for newly eligible patients in North Staffordshire for the period 1996–97 to 2000–01 are in the table. Data for patients who are not eligible have never been collected. No more recent data exists. From March 2003, the Department will be collecting information on the total number of people receiving continuing national health service health care and the number of people newly meeting eligibility criteria for continuing NHS health care.

Number of people newly meeting 'eligibility' criteria for continuing in-patient care, North Staffordshire health authority

	Physically ill	*Mentally ill*	*Others*	*Total*
2000–01	90	45	51	186
1999–2000	87	42	48	177
1998–99	90	42	49	181
1997–98	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	215
1996–97	[1]—	[1]—	[1]—	289

[1] Data not subdivided

Delayed Discharges

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will place a copy of the Quarter 2 2002–03 emergency readmission and delayed discharge figures for over 75s in the Library. [81720]

Jacqui Smith. The Quarter 2, September 2002, figures on delayed discharge and emergency readmission should be available in December and when it is available I will put a copy in the Library.

Diabetes

Mr. Adrian Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if he will publish the National Service Framework delivery strategy for diabetes before the end of this year; [80788]

(2) if he will ensure that the diabetes National Service Framework makes it clear to local health bodies that diabetes is a funding priority; and if he will make a statement. [80787]

Mr. Lammy: We shall be publishing the delivery strategy for the diabetes national service framework in the next few weeks. We have included two national targets for diabetes, for retinal screening and for practice-based registers and structured care, in 'Improvement, Expansion and Reform', which sets the priorities for the National Health Service for the next three years. We shall make announcements on funding for the NHS shortly.

European Food Safety Authority

Joan Ruddock: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will be making nominations for the membership of the European Food Safety Authority's Scientific Panels; if he has made nominations for the panel on genetically modified organisms; whom he has nominated; which criteria were used to make nominations; and whether stakeholders and the public will be asked to make nominations. [80720]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 18 November 2002]:* The Government will not be making nominations. All members of the European food safety authority's scientific panels will be independent scientific experts selected following an open call for expressions of interest and appointed by the authority's management board.

Foster Carers

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many foster families were recruited in each of the last five years; [82033]

(2) how many foster carers were *(a)* single and *(b)* couples in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement; [82032]

(3) how many foster parents have been recruited in each of the last five years for which figures are available. [81105]

Jacqui Smith: There is no national data collection of the number of foster parents recruited by local authorities and independent foster agencies.

Hepatitis C

Dr. Naysmith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how the national strategy on hepatitis C will be implemented; what funding will be available; and what timetables are proposed. [80809]

Ms Blears: The hepatitis C Strategy for England will form the basis of an action plan as proposed in the Chief Medical Officer's infectious diseases strategy, Getting Ahead of the Curve. This action plan will be drawn up by the end of 2002, following the consultation exercise. It will serve as a clear framework setting out actions that need to be taken by Government, the national health service and others to secure improvements in the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of hepatitis C.

A number of funding streams will support the strategy. A major component has been included in health authority allocations to support the National Institute for Clinical Excellence recommended combination drug treatments for moderate/severe liver disease caused by hepatitis C. Other funding streams are:

Central funding of £1.3 million over two years, 2002–03 and 2003–04, has been allocated for raising professional and public awareness and improving surveillance. Funding for future years has yet to be decided.

Funding for the voluntary sector specifically for hepatitis C projects and for projects which are directed at prevention activities for injecting drug users in general has been increased and currently stands at around £0.2 million for 2002–03.

HIV prevention funding includes health promotion for injecting drug users. From 2002–03, HIV prevention is funded through main national health service allocations and £55 million has been included for the coming year. From the returns collected under the AIDS (Control) Act, approximately 14 per cent. in 1999–2000 of the separate allocation before mainstreaming was spent on prevention work on injecting drug use.

The Department also has a central budget for drug misuse for the National Treatment Agency of £175.7 million for 2002–03.

MMR Vaccinations

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps his Department is taking to ensure adequate supplies of single component MMR vaccinations for those parents *(a)* whose children have already started a course of such vaccinations and *(b)* who wish their children to start a course of such vaccinations. [82020]

Ms Blears: The Department does not purchase single measles, mumps and rubella vaccines for children. This is because the triple MMR vaccine provides the best protection against these three potentially fatal diseases.

Children who have started a course of single measles, mumps and rubella vaccinations can complete it using the triple MMR vaccine. Children wishing to start a course of single vaccines are recommended to use the triple vaccine.

Royal United Hospital, Bath

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what assessment he has made of the length of ambulance waits outside casualty at the Royal United Hospital, Bath; [80722]

(2) what assessment he has made of the length of trolley waits at the Royal United Hospital, Bath; [80724]

(3) what assessment he has made of current and foreseeable wait time data at the Royal United Hospital, Bath. [80723]

Ms Blears: Information on ambulance waits outside accident and emergency departments is not collected centrally. However, I have been advised by Wiltshire Ambulance Service national health service trust that waiting times at the Royal United Hospital, Bath have substantially improved in the past two months and average waits are not disrupting ambulance services.

I am also advised by Avon, Gloucestershire and Wiltshire Strategic Health Authority that Royal United Hospital Bath NHS trust has had no trolley waits over 12 hours since July 2002 and that the trust is meeting waiting time targets for both in-patients and out-patients. The trust is continuing to work to minimise trolley waits and to improve waiting times. It is aiming to hit both the 12-month target for in-patients and also the 21-week target for out-patients by the end of March 2003.

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the financial position of *(a)* Royal United Hospital Bath NHS Trust, *(b)* West Wiltshire NHS Primary Care Trust and *(c)* Avon and Wiltshire Mental Health Partnership NHS Trust. [80725]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 18 November 2002]*: The Royal United Hospital Bath is reporting a forecast income and expenditure deficit of £25.2 million for the financial year 2002–03. This deficit is acknowledged to be part of a wider Bath health community financial deficit of £30.7 million and is not wholly attributable to any individual organisation. Bath health community is working in conjunction with the Avon, Gloucestershire and Wiltshire strategic health authority to develop plans leading to financial balance.

Avon and Wiltshire Mental Health Partnership Trust is predicting a year-end deficit of £1.4 million. West Wiltshire Primary Care Trust also has a deficit of £1.2 million. The trusts continue to work with partner agencies to develop solutions to address these problems. Progress has been made in a number of localities and a consultation on service development is under way in others.

Waiting Lists (Mental Health)

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Health in what form he collects statistics on the number of children waiting to be referred to the CAHMS; and what the figures are for the last two years for which figures are available. [81719]

Jacqui Smith: The only information currently available on the waiting time for child and adolescent mental health services (CAMHS) is by the consultant specialty of child and adolescent psychiatry. The latest information on waiting times for inpatient and outpatient appointments is shown in the tables.

We recognise that in some places waiting times CAMHS are unacceptably long. The development of CAMHS is an important part of the work we are taking forward in the children's national service framework. In 2002–3 we are investing an additional 40 million in services provided by the national health service and local authorities which will help in reducing waiting.

On the 16 October my right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State, announced that CAMHS would receive an additional investment of 140 million over the next three years through increased grants to local authorities. This will build capacity, improve access and, together with new NHS investment, help deliver for the first time a comprehensive CAMHS service for every area.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Congestion Charging

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many car parking spaces are available to *(a)* employees of his Department and *(b)* visitors to his Department within the proposed Central London Road User Charging Zone. [81857]

Maria Eagle: Within the proposed central London charging zone there are 112 parking spaces available to employees of the Department. There are no parking spaces designated for visitors to the Department.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the policy is of his Department in relation to the reimbursement of Central London road user charges incurred by its employees. [81837]

Maria Eagle: All civil servants are responsible for their own every day home to office travel costs. The introduction of a central London road users' charge will not affect this basic condition of service. However, staff on official business who are required to drive their own vehicles, or hire vehicles, within the charging zone will be reimbursed.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the estimated cost is to his Department of the central London road user charging scheme for *(a)* 17 February 2003 to 31 March 2003, and *(b)* 1 April 2003 to 31 March 2004. [81876]

Maria Eagle: All civil servants are responsible for payment of their own every day home to office travel costs. The introduction of a central London road user charge will not affect this basic condition of service. Any additional costs incurred to the Department by staff on official business as a result of the congestion charging scheme will be just one element within wider costs which have to be met from budgets for official travelling and other costs.

Information on the number of departmental employees who travel to the central London area on official business is not held centrally. I am therefore unable to give an estimate of the likely cost to the Department.

Age Discrimination

Mr. MacDougall: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when the Government will take powers to make it illegal to discriminate on the grounds of age. [81692]

Alan Johnson: I have been asked to reply.

The Government are committed to introducing legislation under the European Employment Directive outlawing age discrimination in employment and vocational training by December 2006.

The Government have already sought views on a number of general age issues in the consultation document "Towards Equality and Diversity" and we intend to consult again on specific proposals by summer 2003.

MINISTER FOR WOMEN

Domestic Violence

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Minister for Women when she will publish the results of her inquiry into the economic costs of domestic violence. [81089]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 18 November 2002]*: The research project is scheduled to conclude in summer 2003 and the report will be published thereafter.

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Minister for Women when the Women and Equality Unit and the Public Carriage Office will publish their package of measures and promotional products regarding reducing domestic violence; and what these measures will include. [81090]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 18 November 2002]*: The Women and Equality Unit and the Public Carriage Office are continuing to develop plans on awareness raising and domestic violence. We are currently consulting with major charities and with women and children in order to market test a number of propositions. Further details will be announced shortly.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Regional Development Agencies

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when he expects to carry out a review of regional development agency boundaries. [80422]

Alan Johnson: I have been asked to reply.

The Government have no plans to carry out a review of the regional development agency boundaries.

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what mechanisms exist for the review of regional development agency boundaries. [80423]

Alan Johnson: I have been asked to reply.

The boundaries of the regional development agencies are set out in Schedule 1 of the Regional Development Agencies Act 1998. Section 1 of that Act provides that any reference in Schedule 1 to a local government or administrative area is to that area as it is for the time being.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

LPG Stations

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what proportion of petrol stations in the UK supply liquefied petroleum gas to customers. [80505]

Mr. Wilson: The Liquid Petroleum Gas Association (LPGA) informed my Department that there is currently a total of 1179 LPG public refuelling stations in UK (including Offshore Islands and Ireland), of which 666 are located at petrol stations.

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the impact of requiring *(a)* new and *(b)* refurbished petrol stations to provide liquefied petroleum gas. [80506]

Mr. Wilson: An impact assessment has currently not been undertaken, however at a meeting between my Department and the Liquid Petroleum Gas Association in January this year, the association informed us that new retail sites are opening at a rate approaching one per day. Given the incentives from both DFT and my Department and the rate at which sites are opening, the Government continue to promote, encourage, and more importantly continue to raise the awareness of alternative fuel in particular LPG, by continue working with Energy and Transport Industries.

ASW Sheerness (Receivers)

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) how many meetings the senior executives at GOSE and SEEDA had with *(a)* management and *(b)* workforce at ASW Sheerness since 11 July 2002 to discuss its future; [81675]

(2) what representations she has received from *(a)* the Chairman and CEO of SEEDA and *(b)* the GOSE management on the future of ASW Sheerness since 11 July 2002; [81092]

(3) how many meetings the senior executives at GOSE and SEEDA have had with KPMG as receivers for ASW Sheerness since 11 July 2002. [81074]

Alan Johnson *[holding answer 18 November 2002]*: Since ASW went into administrative receivership on 11 July 2002, the Chief Executive and senior officials from SEEDA and GOSE have remained in close touch with my Department on the future of the company.

While the company was in the hands of the receiver, KPMG, the DTI has led the contact with the receiver and in these contacts has taken fully into account the representations it has received from SEEDA and GOSE. During this time efforts made at a regional level by partners have concentrated on planning an appropriate response once the receivers have made a decision.

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what financial help she can offer to ensure all of ASW Sheerness mills are kept on site. [81093]

Alan Johnson *[holding answer 18 November 2002]*: The rules governing aid to the steel industry are embodied in the European Commission Multi-Sectoral Framework on state aid and commission communications on rescue, restructuring and closure aid. These rules prohibit the provision of rescue and restructuring aid to steel companies.

Battery Recycling

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions she and her

officials have had with her European counterparts regarding the recycling of nickel-cadmium batteries; and what plans there are to ban nickel-cadmium batteries *(a)* throughout the European Union and *(b)* in the UK. [80898]

Mr. Wilson: DTI officials have met European Commission officials and key battery organisations such as the European Portable Battery Association and collect NiCad to discuss the recycling of nickel cadmium batteries. DTI officials have also met SAFT, a battery manufacturer that runs the Bat-Re-Back scheme in the UK which accepts all industrial nickel cadmium batteries for recycling.

Beyond transposing the terms of a Commission Decision amending Annex II of the End-of-Life Vehicles Directive, which requires member states to ensure that cadmium in batteries for electric vehicles is not put on the market after 31 December 2005, the UK has no plans at present to ban nickel cadmium batteries. A proposal for a new EU Batteries Directive is currently awaited, and this may call for significant reductions in the use of nickel cadmium batteries throughout the European Union.

College of Arms

Mr. Edwards: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will include members of the College of Arms in the consultation on employment rights for atypical workers. [81653]

Alan Johnson: We are currently engaged in a wide-ranging consultation on the issue of employment status, and will include officers of the College in that consultation.

Electricity Supply (Consumer Interruptions)

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what information she has received on the number of electricity power supply cuts in each county in England in each of the last 10 years. [80932]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 18 November 2002]:* Data on interruptions in supply of electricity to consumers is collected by Ofgem. It is gathered on the basis of the geographic areas covered by each distribution licence rather than by county. Reproduced in Tables 1 and 2 are the number of consumer interruptions, together with the consumer minutes lost. These provide an indication of the duration of interruption.

Table 1—supply interruptions per 100 connected customers

												% change
	1990–91	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*	*1990–91 to 2001–02*
Aquila	169.99	110.28	129.44	125.34	121.32	138.57	147.55	131.98	120.82	139.69	147.77	119.94	
EME	169.40	81.87	74.54	91.75	96.09	97.16	95.07	93.10	76.47	77.80	91.38	78.82	
EPN	75.75	67.50	96.41	59.15	64.77	84.80	89.27	73.71	60.40	66.61	68.83	82.92	
Hydro	176.32	204.14	234.61	177.92	174.90	193.20	147.50	153.10	154.40	141.20	131.61	124.71	
LPN	40.68	46.67	38.12	35.78	39.71	33.06	38.52	39.18	36.89	36.19	39.75	35.59	
NEDL	107.71	90.27	86.69	79.80	88.71	89.96	89.04	90.07	92.59	89.91	98.09	93.65	
SP	70.46	70.97	83.10	58.18	61.08	65.46	57.01	72.95	85.75	82.24	91.52	76.27	
SPN	111.30	102.91	159.90	99.60	104.00	95.20	89.20	91.00	95.50	89.90	88.50	90.88	
Southern	80.08	81.27	82.49	78.21	75.31	79.31	79.02	72.73	63.97	74.37	73.78	99.15	
SP Manweb	81.89	73.75	85.86	88.64	70.04	61.50	57.19	57.33	44.13	53.08	53.01	51.60	
UU	57.60	61.50	56.69	55.85	69.70	60.50	59.50	83.80	57.60	54.70	54.10	49.36	
WPD South. Wales	284.60	228.00	195.28	213.50	219.70	223.30	191.70	185.70	150.20	152.70	158.20	128.40	
WPD south-west	146.00	128.50	118.30	119.40	123.90	116.20	105.50	105.50	80.10	90.40	86.50	107.06	
YEDL	158.45	69.06	71.82	71.05	84.78	86.49	93.12	80.00	71.79	73.03	69.82	58.70	
Average	123.59	101.19	108.09	96.73	99.57	101.77	95.66	95.01	85.04	87.27	89.49	85.50	30.82

Note:
CIs = the number of customers interrupted per 100 customers per year.

Table 2—average customer minutes lost per customer per year

												% change
	1990–91	*1991–92*	*1992–93*	*1993–94*	*1994–95*	*1995–96*	*1996–97*	*1997–98*	*1998–99*	*1999–2000*	*2000–01*	*2001–02*	*1990–91 to 2001–02*
Aquila	397.76	118.14	122.22	144.12	127.96	151.30	125.97	116.21	99.69	116.95	143.22	122.21	
EME	1,003.88	87.34	86.87	97.40	104.93	94.59	78.97	82.24	70.32	71.89	111.62	92.73	
EPN	75.60	65.42	90.56	63.34	94.24	84.94	77.47	70.09	52.88	53.00	66.24	67.88	
Hydro	172.02	270.26	355.82	254.12	233.00	365.00	205.70	219.50	220.00	123.30	111.46	143.46	
LPN	51.31	67.31	52.78	51.80	58.06	53.94	55.92	50.05	45.21	38.76	43.49	36.16	
NEDL	245.96	97.03	101.95	102.27	94.66	86.26	81.80	86.64	97.76	85.24	109.76	87.35	
SP	85.30	75.58	97.50	76.95	69.92	81.03	88.57	77.36	177.31	76.58	151.88	87.46	
SPN	111.60	96.20	118.30	84.10	93.30	77.90	89.30	92.00	75.80	73.20	74.50	88.87	
Southern	103.98	109.18	91.30	74.40	77.61	77.98	67.23	56.03	51.63	57.54	68.74	90.85	
SP Manweb	185.10	108.46	129.29	120.79	101.80	88.37	77.51	96.70	54.69	55.66	55.09	62.52	
UU	87.70	74.70	76.50	68.70	70.00	67.00	65.90	96.40	79.90	62.70	59.70	54.29	
WPD South Wales	330.07	325.38	212.33	199.50	212.00	232.70	189.30	182.90	145.20	136.80	123.30	90.53	
WPD south-west	185.20	176.00	183.60	167.10	133.10	110.80	103.10	108.40	57.70	64.40	70.00	85.99	
YEDL	174.63	59.70	59.30	60.65	68.59	62.29	59.70	59.10	53.70	53.66	56.21	54.78	
Average	229.29	123.62	127.02	111.80	109.94	116.72	97.60	99.54	91.56	76.41	88.94	83.22	63.71

Notes:
1. CMLs = average customer minutes lost per customer per year.
2. Over the period 1990–91 to 2001–02, the number of customer interruptions per 100 connected customers fell by 30.82 per cent. and the average number of customer minutes lost per customer fell by 63.71 per cent.
3. It is important to note that in order to meet accuracy requirements, the DNOs were required to introduce new measurement systems by April 2002. This has meant that there was an increase in the accuracy of reporting in 2001–02. In some cases, this may have led to an increase in reported performance despite the underlying performance remaining the same.

Electricity Supply Network

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what information she has received on the number of people employed in maintenance work in relation to the electricity supply network *(a)* in the last 12 months and *(b)* the last 12 months before privatisation. [80933]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 18 November 2002]:* Our study on the Resilience of the Electricity Transmission and Distribution systems carried out by BPI (May 2002) showed that although overall staff numbers have declined, it was very difficult to make direct comparisons between the situation now and how it was pre-privatisation. Organisational boundaries, working practises and technological advances have changed the way companies operate and they all vary in the extent to which they employ direct labour or outsource work.

Hydro-Electricity

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what support is being given to encourage the harnessing of the potential for generation of hydro-electricity in the Highlands and Islands of Scotland; and how much support is given to wind generation. [80819]

Mr. Wilson: The main means through which hydro in the Highlands and Islands and elsewhere is encouraged is through the Renewables Obligation which we introduced on 1 April this year. New hydro plant and existing hydro plant of up to 20 MW (built before 1990 and refurbished since end December 1989) are eligible for the Obligation.

Wind energy generation, at both onshore and offshore sites in the Highlands and Islands and elsewhere, is also eligible for the Renewables Obligation. In addition, the Government have made provision of £74 million over three years for capital grants for offshore wind energy projects.

Miners' Compensation

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what changes are to be made to the Claims Handling Agreement to allow for more people to get larger sums of compensation for their illnesses and for different types of illness that can be contracted to be included; and if asthma is to be included in the CHA under circumstances other than temporary exacerbation of the condition. [80728]

Mr. Wilson: The Claims Handling Agreements arose out of the court proceedings which in 1997 found British Coal liable for Vibration White Finger (VWF) and in 1998 for respiratory disease. The Claims Handling Agreements deal specifically with compensation for conditions considered by the courts. There is no intention to extend them.

Pneumoconiosis Compensation

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many claimants have been awarded lump sum payments under the Pneumoconiosis Compensation Scheme when under the age of 62 years since 1992. [81917]

Mr. Wilson: 1,478 claimants under the age of 62 have been awarded lump sum payments under the Pneumoconiosis Compensation Scheme since 1992.

Adam Price: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many claimants have been awarded weekly benefits under the Pneumoconiosis Compensation Scheme since 1992. [81960]

Mr. Wilson: 286 claimants have been awarded weekly benefits under the Pneumoconiosis Compensation Scheme since 1992.

Power Failures

Mr. Hurst: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what steps she is taking to ensure that compensation is paid by the electricity supply companies following the power cuts on and after 27 October 2002. [80475]

Mr. Wilson: I would urge all customers who feel that their supplier has not fulfilled its responsibility to put in a claim for compensation (which should be made within one month of supply being restored).

Compensation is a matter for the regulator's office, the Office of Gas and Electricity Markets (Ofgem) and I know that it is watching the situation closely.

Compensation is not automatic in the case of storms. Initially, under the guaranteed standards of performance, it is for network operators to decide whether to offer compensation or to invoke an exemption for severe weather.

Customers can challenge non-payment of compensation through the statutory consumer watchdog, Energywatch, which will liaise with Ofgem.

In the final instance, after all other routes have been explored, Ofgem can make a determination.

I welcome the fact that once company has recognised that customers do have rights and has announced that it will be paying compensation in certain circumstances.

Mr. Hurst: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many homes in Essex were without power from 27 October 2002 for *(a)* 24 hours, *(b)* 36 hours, *(c)* 48 hours, *(d)* three days, *(e)* four days and *(f)* more than four days. [80476]

Mr. Wilson: I have been advised by LE Group that the numbers of customers without electricity in Essex arising from the storm on 27 October 2002 were as follows:

Period without electricity	*Number of Customers*
(b) up to 36 hours	15,715
(c) up to 48 hours	9,854
(d) up to 3 days (72 hours)	5,976
(e) up to 4 days (96 hours)	2,398
(f) more than 4 days	1,856

With regard to your question *(a)*, LE Group have advised me that they do not have an accurate figure for the number of customers without electricity in Essex

after the first 24 hours. However they have confirmed that 159,791 customers in Essex were restored in the first 24 hours after the storm.

Mr. Hurst: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions she has had with electricity suppliers since 27 October 2002. [80477]

Mr. Wilson: The Department has regular discussions with electricity suppliers. However, following the storms of 27 October, I commissioned British Power International (BPI) to carry out an independent review of the extent to which distribution networks were able to withstand severe weather, and how the distribution licence holders handled the emergency caused by the recent storms. The electricity network operators who are to be reviewed are:

London Electricity Group, including 24 seven (covering the Eastern, London and Seeboard distribution areas);
Scottish and Southern Energy (in respect of the Southern area);
Western Power Distribution (covering the south-west and South Wales);
Powergen (covering the east midlands);
Aquila (covering the west midlands);
Scottish Power (in respect of the MANWEB area); and
United Utilities (which manages the network in the north-west).

The review has already started and involves detailed questions to each of the companies. Initial findings will be published by the end of December.

Regional Selective Assistance

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what *(a)* amount and *(b)* proportion of the Government's budget for regional selective assistance to the Government's south west zone has been allocated to *(a)* Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly and *(b)* the remainder of its zone in each of the last four years for which information is available. [80758]

Alan Johnson: Based on offers of regional selective assistance made:

	Value (£ million)	*Per cent of total south west region*
1998–99		
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	8.1	57
Remainder of south west region	6.1	43
1999–2000		
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	2.1	25
Remainder of south west region	6.2	75
2000–01		
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	1.0	12
Remainder of south west region	7.6	88
2001–02		
Cornwall and Isles of Scilly	4.8	57
Remainder of south west region	3.6	43

Storm Damage

Phil Sawford: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on sustainable energy requirements in the British Isles. [80425]

Mr. Wilson: The Government are currently carrying out a review of future energy policy with a view to issuing a White Paper in the new year. The White Paper will show how energy policy fits within the Government's overall approach to sustainable development.

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what recent assessment she has made of the damage to the electricity distribution network caused by trees and branches during recent storms; and if she will make a statement; [80880]

(2) what plans she has to resume cutting back trees and branches close to power lines to avoid disruption to power supplies; and if she will make a statement. [80827]

Mr. Wilson: On 29 October 2002, I commissioned British Power International (BPI), to carry out an independent review of how the distribution licence holders handled the emergency caused by the recent storms. The electricity network operators who are to be reviewed are:

London Electricity Group including 24 seven (covering the Eastern, London and Seeboard distribution areas);
Scottish & Southern Energy (in respect of the Southern area);
Western Power Distribution (covering the South West and South Wales);
Powergen (covering the East Midlands);
Aquila (covering the West Midlands);
Scottish Power (in respect of the MANWEB area)
United Utilities (which manages the network in the North West)

The review has already started and initial findings will be published by the end of December. The study will include an assessment of the condition of the network and its ability to withstand such storms. This includes the degree to which trees and branches have been lopped to prevent them falling on lines during the high winds.

Vibration White Finger

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, under what circumstances would someone get compensation under the Claims Handling Agreement for illness contracted from mining work. [81038]

Mr. Wilson: The Department has two Claims Handling Agreements (CHA's which cover illnesses contracted from mining work. One covers Respiratory Disease and the other covers Vibration White Finger (VWF). The Agreements set out in detail the circumstances in which miners or their families are eligible for compensation.

In order for a claimants to pursue a claim for Respiratory disease the miner needs to have worked after 4 June 1954 for mines in England and Wales, and after 4 June 1949 for mines in Scotland, as well as show signs of respiratory illness as covered by the CHA. In order to pursue a claim for Vibration White Finger the miner must have worked in mines after 1 January 1975 and show signs of Vibration White Finger. Any compensation which claimants then receive for either type of illness would be dependent upon results of a Medical Assessment, the years spent working in the mine, the type of work undertaken, other factors that may influence a claimant's ill health, as well as other factors stipulated under the agreements.

Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 20 November 2002

DEFENCE

Firefighters' Dispute

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the cost of replacing Ministry of Defence Green Goddesses with an equivalent number of modern fire appliances. [81723]

Mr. Raynsford: I have been asked to reply.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister owns and maintains the Green Goddess fleet. Although the Office has considered the possibility of replacing Green Goddesses, there has been no specific assessment of the cost of replacing the Green Goddesses with an equivalent number of modern fire appliances.

Barracks

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many persons constitute the capacity of Catterick barracks; how many officers and other personnel from what regiments form the permanent staffing component of this sum; how many officers and other personnel from what regiments are regularly accommodated on a temporary basis; how many *(a)* suicides and *(b)* other deaths have occurred in each year since 1990; how many of these incidents were firearms-related; which of these incidents *(i)* were subject to investigation by the Royal Military Police, (ii) were the subject of an external investigation, (iii) were the subject of a coroner's inquest and (iv) gave rise to courts martial or criminal proceedings; and what the outcome was in each case; [80690]

(2) how many persons constitute the capacity of Bindon barracks, Hameln; how many officers and other personnel from what regiments form the permanent staffing component of this sum; how many officers and other personnel from what regiments are regularly accommodated on a temporary basis; how many *(a)* suicides and *(b)* other deaths have occurred in each year since 1990; how many of these incidents were firearms-related; which of these incidents *(i)* were subject to investigation by the Royal Military Police, (ii) were the subject of an external investigation, (iii) were the subject of a Coroner's inquest and (iv) gave rise to courts martial or criminal proceedings; and what the outcome was in each case; [80669]

(3) how many persons constitute the capacity of the Army barrack at Deepcut, Surrey; how many officers and other personnel from what regiments form the permanent staffing component of this sum; how many officers and other personnel from what regiments are regularly accommodated on a temporary basis; how many *(a)* suicides and *(b)* other deaths have occurred in each year since 1990; how many of these incidents were firearms-related; which of these incidents *(i)* were subject to investigation by the Royal Military Police, (ii) were the subject of an external investigation, (iii) were the subject of a Coroner's inquest and (iv) gave rise to courts martial or criminal proceedings; and what the outcome was in each case; [80671]

(4) how many persons constitute the capacity of Cavalry barracks, Hounslow, Middlesex; how many officers and other personnel from what regiments form the permanent staffing component of this sum; how many officers and other personnel from what regiments are regularly accommodated on a temporary basis; how many *(a)* suicides and *(b)* other deaths have occurred in each year since 1990; how many of these incidents were firearms-related; which of these incidents *(i)* were subject to investigation by the Royal Military Police, (ii) were the subject of an external investigation, (iii) were the subject of a Coroner's inquest and (iv) gave rise to courts martial or criminal proceedings; and what the outcome was in each case. [80688]

(5) how many persons constitute the capacity of Army barracks in Bielefield, Germany; how many officers and other personnel from what regiments form the permanent staffing component of this sum; how many officers and other personnel from what regiments are regularly accommodated on a temporary basis; how many *(a)* suicides and *(b)* other deaths have occurred in each year since 1990; how many of these incidents were firearms-related; which of these incidents *(i)* were subject to investigation by the Royal Military Police, (ii) were the subject of an external investigation (iii) were the subject of a Coroner's inquest, and (iv) gave rise to courts martial or criminal proceedings; and what the outcome was in each case; [80670]

(6) how many persons constitute the capacity of Drumadd barracks, Northern Ireland; how many officers and other personnel from what regiments form the permanent staffing component of this sum; how many officers and other personnel from what regiments are regularly accommodated on a temporary basis; how many *(a)* suicides and *(b)* other deaths have occurred in each year since 1990; how many of these incidents were firearms-related; which of these incidents *(i)* were subject to investigation by the Royal Military Police, (ii) were the subject of an external investigation, (iii) were the subject of a Coroner's inquest and (iv) gave rise to courts martial or criminal proceedings; and what the outcome was in each case. [80687]

(7) how many persons constitute the capacity of Quebec barracks, Osnabruck; how many officers and other personnel from what regiments form the permanent staffing component of this sum; how many officers and other personnel from what regiments are regularly accommodated on a temporary basis; how many *(a)* suicides and *(b)* other deaths have occurred in each year since 1990; how many of these incidents were firearms-related; which of these incidents were subject to investigation by the Royal Military Police, (ii) were the subject of an external investigation, (iii) were the subject of a Coroner's inquest and (iv) gave rise to courts martial or criminal proceedings; and what the outcome was in each case; [80668]

(8) how many persons constitute the capacity of Browning barracks, Aldershot, Hampshire; how many officers and other personnel from what regiments form

the permanent staffing component of this sum; how many officers and other personnel from what regiments are regularly accommodated on a temporary basis; how many *(a)* suicides and *(b)* other deaths have occurred in each year since 1990; how many of these incidents were firearms-related; which of these incidents *(i)* were subject to investigation by the Royal Military Police, (ii) were the subject of an external investigation, (iii) were the subject of a Coroner's inquest and (iv) gave rise to courts martial or criminal proceedings; and what the outcome was in each case. [80689]

Dr. Moonie: The information requested is not held centrally or in the form requested and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Combat Helmet

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to introduce an improved combat helmet for the forces. [80702]

Dr. Moonie: Plans for the Future Integrated Soldier Technology (FIST) programme include the provision of a helmet with improved ballistic protection. We are also looking at a replacement for the in-service helmet to equip those soldiers who will not have FIST.

Courts Martial

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many members of HM armed forces in each of the past five years were *(a)* charged and *(b)* found guilty at courts martial for each category of serious crimes of violence up to that of murder; and how many of those found guilty *(i)* are in prison and were (ii) dishonourably and (iii) honourably discharged from the services and (iv) have resumed their military careers. [80613]

Dr. Moonie: I will write to my hon Friend and a copy of my letter will be placed in the Library.

Firefighting Training

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what basic training is given to *(a)* soldiers, *(b)* sailors and *(c)* airmen in firefighting in the normal course of their training. [82012]

Dr. Moonie: The degree of firefighting training given to Service personnel depends upon the role that they are expected to perform during normal military duties. All service personnel are given basic fire awareness training including use of fire extinguishers, raising the alarm, means of escape and general fire precautions. Inaddition, more comprehensive training is given to those personnel who work in an environment where there may be a requirement to deal with fire.

Navy personnel, as part of the Basic Sea Survival Course, are trained in the procedural teamwork of shipboard firefighting. On board ship, theoretical training is given on Naval Battle Control of Damage together with Intermediate Sea Survival techniques. Firefighting teams on board ships receive two weeks of specific training in firefighting techniques while Navy aircraft handlers also receive ongoing training in core firefighting skills and, depending on their rank, training in firefighting leadership, command and control and technical expertise.

Specialist RAF firefighters in Trade Group eight receive comprehensive training in domestic (structural) firefighting, including breathing apparatus search and rescue procedures. Additionally, all RAF firefighters receive specialised training in aircraft crash fire fighting and rescue techniques and procedures, including the use of cutting equipment. Progressive career training develops increasing levels of leadership and command and control skills and enhanced technical knowledge appropriate to each rank.

HMS Trafalgar

Mr. Breed: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he expects the repair work to HMS Trafalgar to begin; and how long it will be out of commission. [81113]

Mr. Ingram: It is too soon to say when the repair work on HMS Trafalgar will start or how long she will be out of commission. First, we need to assess the full extent of the damage and this work cannot begin until she is in dry dock in Devonport Dockyard. However, she was in any event due to undergo a planned maintenance and docking period starting in Spring 2003 and completing in early 2004.

Iraq

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what support the United Kingdom link provide for the military protection and support of UN weapons inspectors in Iraq; and which other nations are expected to provide the major elements of such protection and support. [80961]

Mr. Hoon: The United Nations Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission (UNMOVIC) has not made any request for the United Kingdom to provide for the military protection and support of UN weapons inspectors in Iraq. We are not aware of such a request having been made to other nations. The Government is committed to assist UNMOVIC and the International Atomic Energy Agency Iraq Action Team to fulfil their mandate effectively.

IT Security

Brian White: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps he has taken to review the security of the Department's IT system; and how many digital attacks there were on the Department's system in *(a)* October and *(b)* 2002. [80778]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence is continuously reviewing, and seeking ways to improve, the security of its communications and information systems. Electronic protective measures employed to safeguard classified data include the use of firewalls to protect systems, the identification and authentication of users and audit of user activities.

The Ministry of Defence, in common with any organisation that is connected to the Internet, is subject to widespread and frequent attempts to probe its electronic boundaries. It is Ministry of Defence policy not to make detailed comment on the protection

measures applied to communications and information systems, or on techniques such as computer hacking, as these could assist potential enemies to penetrate these elements of national security.

During October 2002, no incidents of computer hacking were reported. So far this year 10 incidents of computer hacking have been reported, of which one was a website defacement. None of these had any significant impact on the conduct of military operations or other core Defence business.

Office Technology

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the corporate headquarters office technology system; and what his assessment is of its level of usage by MoD staff. [80972]

Dr. Moonie: The Corporate Headquarters Office Technology System (CHOTS), first introduced in the Ministry of Defence in the early 1990s and rolled out progressively since, is MOD's workhorse computing platform for office automation within the Head Office of the Department, and is installed in or linked to major Commands and HQ locations, at 23 main sites and 128 minor sites both in the United Kingdom and overseas. It comprises some 13,000 workstations and supports over 25,000 user accounts, and is used predominantly for the preparation of documents, spreadsheets and presentation material, for e-mail preparation, transmission and reception, and for internal web site hosting and browsing. The system enjoys a high level of usage by MOD staff, running at typically 80per cent. of capacity. Typical average e-mail traffic within the system is presently in the region of 2.25 million per month.

Retired Officers Scheme

Dr. Andrew Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the future of the Retired Officers scheme. [81662]

Dr. Moonie: The Retired Officer Scheme has served us well for more than four decades, but a continuing manning deficit coupled with the emergence of increasingly stringent employment legislation has caused us to examine alternative means of capitalising on the valuable experience of those retiring from the Armed Forces. In addition to this source of expertise we would also like to attract people with suitable experience from industry, the Civil Service, and from the wider Defenceenvironment. After full consultation it has been decided that there will be no further recruitment into the Retired Officer Scheme. Instead, people will be recruited both internally and externally into Military Support posts within the mainstream Civil Service. Some former RO posts that may require a uniquely military background, or a specific military qualification, will become the responsibility of the respective Service Secretaries. Serving Retired Officers will be invited to assimilate into the new arrangements, although they will be free to remain as established Retired Officers should they wish to do so.

Service Personnel (Deaths)

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the arrangements are for the investigation of the cause of death of service personnel serving overseas in *(a)* Germany, *(b)* Bosnia, *(c)* Kosovo, *(d)* Afghanistan and *(e)* other principal countries of posting; by what means he ensures the protection of rights to an independent, prompt and effective investigation under the European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms. [80647]

Dr. Moonie: Rules governing jurisdiction for investigation of un-natural deaths of Service personnel outside the United Kingdom are detailed in the Queen's Regulations for each service. These state that the position on jurisdiction is as follows:

> Wholly with the service authorities where an offence has been committed against service law only but subject, in a foreign country or independent country with the Commonwealth, to the law of that country or the terms of a treaty or agreement permitting the service authorities to exercise such jurisdiction;
>
> wholly with the civil authorities where an offence has been committed solely under the local law ;
>
> with both the Service authorities and the civil authorities where an offence has been committed against both Service law and the law of the country or colony concerned; or
>
> in the case of a force which is forming part of a United Nations force occupying former enemy territory, jurisdiction generally lies exclusively with the authorities of the force.

Investigations are conducted by the Special Investigations Branch (SIB) of the relevant UK Military Police, where appropriate in conjunction with the local civilian police force.

Where the body is returned to the UK it automatically becomes subject to an inquest by HM Coroner or (in Scotland) the Procurator Fiscal. All cases of sudden death are investigated to Home Office standards using accepted best practice.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Domestic Violence

2. **Judy Mallaber:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what action his Department is taking to help victims of domestic violence. [81539]

Mrs. Roche: Tackling domestic violence is a major priority. We have improved access to housing for women fleeing violence and made their support a priority for the new Supporting People programme. We will shortly publish new, practical guidance to local authorities on preparing for Supporting People, and are putting in place plans for further action, which will be announced shortly.

Housing Shortage

12. **Hugh Bayley:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what additional help will be given to cities and towns in the north of England which have an acute shortage of affordable housing. [81549]

Mr. McNulty: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has allocated £193 million of the Housing Corporation's approved development programme for

2003–04 to the northern regions. This represents an increase of 24 per cent. on the current year for the provision of affordable housing.

Grant Distribution System

13. **Mr. Syms:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister when his Department will announce the level of floors to grant changes as a result of the Government consultation reviewing the formula grant distribution system. [81551]

Mr. Raynsford: We will announce our proposals for the levels of grant floors to Parliament as part of the provisional 2003–04 local government finance settlement. We expect to do that around the beginning of December, subject to parliamentary business.

Affordable Housing

14. **Dr. Julian Lewis:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many new affordable housing units were built in rural areas in each of the last five years. [81552]

Mr. McNulty: Latest available information on the number of new dwellings constructed within local authority districts covering rural areas by both registered social landlords and local authorities in England is:

	Number
1996–97	4,340
1997–98	4,100
1998–99	3,240
1999–2000	2,940
2000–01	2,970

Equivalent information for 2001–02 is not currently available.

21. **Mr. Burstow:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many new affordable homes were built in the United Kingdom in the past 12 months. [81561]

Mr. McNulty: Over 24,500 new homes were constructed by both registered social landlords and local authorities in the UK during 2000–01, the latest period for which full data are available.

Housing Standards

15. **Mr. Tony Clarke:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on his plans to introduce legislation to improve housing standards and standards of management of private rented accommodation. [81553]

Mr. McNulty: As announced in the Queen's Speech last week, the Government intend to publish a draft Housing Bill this session. The Bill will make clear our commitment to introduce the mandatory licensing of houses in multiple occupation, the selective licensing of landlords in areas of low housing demand and replace the existing housing fitness regime with the evidence-based Housing Health and Safety Rating System. Taken together this provides a package of measures that targets poor property condition and management standards in the parts of the private rented sector which accommodate some of the most vulnerable in our society.

Additionally, this Bill will demonstrate how we intend to make the home buying and selling process more transparent and certain, and so reduce the stress and expense suffered by hundreds of thousands of consumers each year when home sales fall through or are delayed.

Climate Change

16. **John Robertson:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on climate change talks he has held since July. [81556]

The Deputy Prime Minister: I have raised climate change issues in a number of meetings with senior international figures. My right hon. Friend the Member for Derby, South (Margaret Beckett) represents the UK in international climate change negotiations.

Empty Homes

17. **Mr. Kidney:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what initiatives he intends to take to reduce the number of empty homes in England. [81557]

Mr. McNulty: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is taking forward the recommendations of the Select Committee on Empty Homes report of March 2002. We are working to provide local authorities with effective powers and guidance to enable them to reduce the number of long-term empty homes in England and maximise opportunities to convert commercial property.

Mr. Edward Davey: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) what plans he has to update the Revised Guidance on Securing the Better Use of Empty Homes, issued in July 1999; [81938]

(2) what updates and revisions have been made to the Revised Guidance on Securing the Better Use of Empty Homes issued by the then Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions in July 1999. [81695]

Mr. McNulty: We have not issued any updated material since the Revised Guidance was issued, but we plan to issue a new version early next year.

Social Exclusion Unit

18. **Mr. Lazarowicz:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the work programme of the Social Exclusion Unit. [81558]

Mrs. Roche: The SEU is contributing to the ODPM's aim to create thriving, inclusive, sustainable communities, with current projects looking at:

young runaways;

transport and social exclusion; and

the educational attainment of children in care.

Mr right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister will decide on any new projects in due course.

Regional Government

19. **Mr. George Osborne:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what estimate he has made of the cost of establishing an elected North West Regional Assembly. [81559]

Mr. Raynsford: The costs of establishing elected regional assemblies will vary from region to region, mainly due to the different sizes of their electorates, but we expect them all to fall into a range of around £15million to £30 million a region, including the costs of a referendum and of the first assembly elections. The North West is likely to fall towards the upper end of this range.

Local Authorities (Taxation)

20. **Mr. Goodman:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what plans his Department has to grant local authorities more power to raise taxation. [81560]

Mr. Leslie: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Member for Greenwich and Woolwich (Mr. Raynsford) on 16 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 236W. We also announced yesterday that we will be granting local authorities new powers to restrict council tax discounts on second homes and long-term empty properties.

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many representations his Department has received from Eddisbury constituency residents about local government funding in the last 12 months; and if he will make a statement on the arguments in those representations. [81033]

Mr. Raynsford: The county of Cheshire is one of the constituent authorities of the F40 education funding campaign, from whom a very large number of letters were received as part of the recent consultation on local government grant distribution. Our records show that five letters have been received directly from residents of Eddisbury constituency in the last 12 months.

British-Irish Council

22. **Kevin Brennan:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the future programme of the British-Irish Council. [81562]

The Deputy Prime Minister: I will be leading the UK delegation to the next British-Irish Council summit in New Lanark, Scotland on 22 November. The Government remain fully committed to the Council.

Boundary Commission

23. **David Taylor:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what Boundary Commission reviews are planned ahead of the referendums on regional assemblies. [81565]

Mr. Raynsford: If the Regional Assemblies (Preparations) Bill introduced in the House on 14 November 2002 is enacted, we intend to direct the Boundary Commission to undertake local government reviews of existing two-tier local government arrangements in those regions where there is deemed to be interest in holding a referendum on an elected regional assembly. The committee would be required to recommend the unitary structure that it considered most appropriate for the area.

Census Data

24. **Andrew Bennett:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make a statement about use of Census data in setting next year's council budgets. [81566]

Mr. Leslie: We distribute grant in support of local authority expenditure by means of a formula that uses the best available data. The Registrar General has advised that the 2001 Census provides the most accurate possible census result. We therefore expect to use population data from the 2001 Census in the grant formula for 2003–04.

Fire Dispute

25. **Mr. Win Griffiths:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what progress has been made in solving the firefighters' dispute. [81567]

Mr. Raynsford: Informal discussions took place yesterday involving the FBU and the Deputy Prime Minister, and the FBU and the Local Government Employers. The Local Government Employers are ready to talk, and we urge the FBU to return to formal negotiations.

Michael Fabricant: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many Green Goddess fire engines and associated equipment will be in Staffordshire during the firefighters' industrial dispute; and where they will be deployed. [81051]

Mr. Raynsford: Emergency cover in Staffordshire is currently planned to consist of 12 Green Goddesses, five breathing apparatus teams (BARTs), and one rescue team equipped with specialist equipment (a REST), manned by military personnel. The contingency arrangements also effect thousands of the police, NHS and local authority staff. The table sets out where the Green Goddesses, BARTs and RESTs will be based.

Location	*Number of Green Goddesses*	*Number of BARTs*
Burton-on-Trent	2	1
Cannock	2	1
Cobridge	2	1
Lichfield	2	1
Longston	2	1
Stafford	2	0

Note:
The REST will be based at Stafford

The provision of Ministry of Defence emergency fire cover has been planned in consultation with the Chief Fire Officer to minimise call-out response times and maximise the availability of a range of firefighting capabilities.

The command and operational structure for emergency fire cover has been designed to enable maximum flexibility and use of available resources, whether from within a county or from assets deployed nearby in neighbouring counties. The deployment of

firefighters will be based on the assessment of how best to respond to an emergency in the quickest time possible. The deployment will be kept under review.

British Summer Time

Bob Russell: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will extend the British summer time arrangement to operate throughout the year; and if he will make a statement. [80753]

Alan Johnson: I have been asked to reply.

There are no plans to extend British summer time throughout the year. The start and end dates of summer time are harmonised across EC member states through a European Directive. The Directive stipulates that, in each member state, clocks are put forward annually by one hour during the period between the last Sunday in March and the last Sunday in October.

Carbon Emissions

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what recent assessment his Department has made of the carbon-absorbing capacity of new forests and the impact this will have on the Kyoto protocols; and if he will make a statement. [80882]

Mr. Meacher: I have been asked to reply.

New forests reduce the atmospheric concentration of greenhouse gases, because the trees remove carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and, despite an initial loss of soil carbon due to disturbance during planting, the input of organic matter from trees via litter on the forest floor increases the amount of carbon in the soil over time. We estimate that new forests planted in the UK since 1990 will remove about 0.6 million tonnes of carbon per year (MtC/yr) during the first commitment period under the Kyoto Protocol, contributing about 0.3 per cent. towards our 12.5 per cent. emissions reduction commitment. Taking into account the possible contribution from the Clean Development Mechanism as well as new forests planted in other developed countries, new forests could contribute the equivalent of a reduction of about 1.5 per cent. of base year emissions towards the commitments averaged over all countries which ratify the Kyoto Protocol. However the actual outcome will depend on how the countries choose to meet their commitments, on actual rates of planting, and on detailed application of the rules for sinks accounting agreed in Marakkesh.

Congestion Charging

Mr. Chope: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the estimated cost is to his Department of the central London road user charging scheme for *(a)* 17 February 2003 to 31 March 2003, and *(b)* 1 April 2003 to 31 March 2004. [81878]

Mr. Leslie: The information requested is not held centrally, and could only be provided at disproportionate cost. Any additional costs to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister as a result of the congestion charging scheme will be just one element within wider costs which have to be met from budgets for official travelling and other costs.

Council Tax

Mr. Spring: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the average Band council tax was in *(a)* Norfolk, *(b)* Essex and *(c)* Cambridgeshire in *(i)* 1997–98 and (ii) 2002–03. [81111]

Mr. Raynsford: The average area Band D council tax in Norfolk, Essex and Cambridgeshire in 1997–98 and 2002–03 was:

£

	1997–98	*2002–03*
Norfolk	620	983
Essex[1]	645	995
Cambridgeshire[2]	590	948

[1] 1997–98 figures for Essex include Southend-on-Sea and Thurrock. These authorities became unitary authorities on 1 April 1998.
[2] 1997–98 figures for Cambridgeshire include Peterborough. Peterborough became a unitary authority on 1 April 1998.

In 1997–98 and 2002–03 the median council tax band in Norfolk was Band B, and in Essex and Cambridgeshire the median council tax band was Band C. The average area council tax for these bands was:

£

	Band	*1997–98*	*2002–03*
Norfolk	B	483	765
Essex[1]	C	573	884
Cambridgeshire[2]	C	525	843

[1] 1997–98 figures for Essex include Southend-on-Sea and Thurrock. These authorities became unitary authorities on 1 April 1998.
[2] 1997–98 figures for Cambridgeshire include Peterborough. Peterborough became a unitary authority on 1 April 1998.

Development Land

Mr. Edward Davey: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what assessment he has made of the efficacy of his definition of *(a)* previously developed land and *(b)* brownfield sites; and what plans he has to alter that definition. [81936]

Mr. McNulty: There are a number of definitions in use. The technical agreement for the Department of Environment, Transport and Regions public service agreement 2001- 04 defined previously-developed land (PDL) by reference to the definition of PDL in planning policy guidance note 3 housing (PPG3) and brownfield land as all land included in the National Land Use database (NLUD-PDL). The practical application of the definition of PDL is kept under review by the NLUD Board and has been considered in the course of ongoing research on the implementation of PPG3. There are no plans to alter the definition.

Fire Station Flooding (York)

Hugh Bayley: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister for how many days parts of York's Tower Street fire station were flooded during November 2000; for how long these parts of the fire station were out of use thereafter; how much it cost to repair the building; whether these costs were covered by insurance; how much it cost the North Yorkshire Fire and Rescue Service in revenue terms to deal with the disruption of their use of the premises; and

what assessment he has made of the economic cost to the wider community of the disruption to the use of parts of the fire station. [80998]

Mr. Leslie: This information requested is not held centrally, and could only be provided at disroportionalte cost. The matters raised are for the North Yorkshire fire and Rescue Authority.

Compulsory Purchase

Mr. Edward Davey: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many homes have been compulsorily purchased using central Government funding in the last two years. [81935]

Mr. McNulty: The information requested is not held centrally, and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

Homelessness

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) how many persons were homeless in *(a)* December 2001 and *(b)* January 2002; [81708]

(2) how many persons were homeless during *(a)* December 2000 and *(b)* January 2001; [81939]

(3) how many homeless persons were living in *(a)* bed and breakfast hotels, *(b)* hostels and *(c)* other temporary accommodation in *(i)* December 2001 and (ii) January 2002; [81706]

(4) how many homeless persons were living in *(a)* bed and breakfast hotels, *(b)* hostels and *(c)* other temporary accommodation in *(i)* December 2000 and (ii) January 2001; [81941]

(5) how many homeless persons were living in *(a)* bed and breakfast hotels, *(b)* hostels and *(c)* other temporary accommodation in *(i)* December 1999 and (ii) January 2000; [82395]

(6) how many persons were homeless during *(a)* December 1999 and *(b)* January 2000. [82392]

Mrs. Roche: The precise information requested is not collected centrally, and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. Summary information on local authorities activity under statutory homelessness provisions is reported to the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister on a quarterly, rather than monthly, basis, and it relates to households rather than persons. This includes the number of households accepted under the homelessness provisions of the 1985 and 1996 Housing Acts as being eligible for assistance, unintentionally homeless and in priority need, and the number of these households resident in various types of temporary accommodation at the end of each quarter.

National and some regional information on local authorities activity is provided in a quarterly statistical release published by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister. This includes information for recent quarters and years on the number of households accepted as homeless (Table 2), as well as those in various types of temporary accommodation, including bed and breakfast and hostels (Table 6). Copies are available in the House Library, and also via the ODPM website. The latest edition, which was published on 11 September 2002, presents statistics up to the end of June 2002.

Local Government Finance

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) what responses relating to the local government finance consultation have been received from *(a)* Chiltern District Council and *(b)* Buckinghamshire County Council; [81172]

(2) what response relating to the local government finance consultation has been received from Buckinghamshire county council in relation to education funding; and when it was received. [81174]

Mr. Raynsford: Responses to the consultation (including views on education funding) were received from both Buckinghamshire county council and Chiltern district council. Both were received by the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister on 30 September.

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what responses relating to the local government finance consultation have been received from *(a)* South Buckinghamshire district council and *(b)* Wycombe district council. [82383]

Mr. Raynsford: Detailed responses to the Formula Grant Distribution consultation were received from both South Buckinghamshire and Wycombe district councils before the formal close of the consultation on 30 September 2002.

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister (1) what impact changes in the local government formula grant will have on public services delivered by *(a)* South Buckinghamshire district council, *(b)* Wycombe district council and *(c)* Buckinghamshire county council; [82384]

(2) what impact changes in the local government grant will have on public services in South Buckinghamshire. [82381]

Mr. Raynsford: We will announce the new system for distributing Formula Grant, including detailed grant allocations for individual authorities, at the time of the provisional local government finance settlement which we expect to be around the start of December. Once the Government has allocated its grant, decisions about budgets and services are primarily for local councils to make. However, we have already guaranteed that no authority will face a cut in grant next year on a like for like basis, and we hope to do better than that when we announce the actual floors and ceilings scheme as part of the provisional settlement.

Urban Deprived Areas Fund

Mr. Challen: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how much of the Post Office fund for urban deprived areas has been spent; and on what. [80486]

Mrs. Roche: None. The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is seeking to launch the scheme in the near future, with receipt of first applications from 31 January 2003.

Water Charges (Private Landlords)

Lynne Jones: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will make it his policy to make private landlords responsible for the payment of water charges on shorthold tenancies. [81047]

Mr. Morley: I have been asked to reply.

There are no plans to legislate to change the responsibilities of landlords and tenants for water charges.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH AFFAIRS

Europe Convention

Denzil Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will place in the Library a copy of the deposition which he presented to the Secretariat of the convention in his capacity as Her Majesty's Government's representative on the Convention on the Future of Europe. [80406]

Mr. MacShane: A copy of Professor Dashwood's draft treaty, which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Wales presented to the Future of Europe Convention, has been placed in the Library. It is also available on the Convention Website (http://european-convention.eu.int).

Departmental Language Training

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the cost was of language training courses for employees of the Foreign Office in the last financial year. [81497]

Mr. Rammell: The cost of language training courses for employees of the Foreign Office was £2,147,493.

This includes all the costs for language tuition required for employees' jobs as well as future career development.

Detained British Citizens

Mr. Tom Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (1) what representations the UK Government has made on British citizens held by the United States at the Guantanamo Base in Cuba; [81668]

(2) what discussions he has had with the US Government concerning the continued detention of people captured in the conflict in Afghanistan. [81667]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has discussed the specific issue of the British detainees held by the United States on several occasions with the US Secretary of State, most recently on October 15.

We remain in regular contact with the US about the situation of the British detainees. In addition we have also encouraged them more generally to move forward with the process of determining the future of all the detainees.

European Arrest Warrant

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with other EU Foreign Ministers concerning the European arrest warrant. [81496]

Mr. MacShane: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs has had no formal meetings with other EU Foreign Ministers concerning the European arrest warrant, although the matter may have arisen informally. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for the Home Office has responsibility for this matter.

Hungary

Mr. Andrew Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Government of Hungary concerning Law LXXIV, 2001 (PA IS3); what assessment he has made of the compatibility of this law with *(a)* European Union membership; and *(b)* Council of Europe membership; what representations he has made to other European Union member states and the European Commission concerning the acceptability of Hungary as a member state; what representations he has made to the Council of Europe concerning the acceptability of Hungary as a member of the Council; and if he will make a statement. [80494]

Mr. MacShane: We have made no representations to the Government of Hungary or any other government or international body concerning Law LXXIV, 2001 (PA 153), "amendments of certain legislation regulating financial affairs", amending law CXXIV of 1997. We do not connect it to membership of the EU or the Council of Europe.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Illegal Immigrants

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on illegal immigrants and the exploitation of migrant workers in Northern Ireland. [80820]

Beverley Hughes: It is an offence to facilitate the entry of an illegal entrant; or to harbour one and to employ one who does not have permission to work. The Police Service for Northern Ireland (PSNI) is primarily responsible for dealing with such offences. There has been one conviction for facilitation in the past 18 months. United Kingdom Immigration Service works closely with PSNI and also with the Irish immigration authorities to gather evidence, and where appropriate, prosecutions will be brought.

I am aware of a recent BBC documentary highlighting cases of illegal workers in Northern Ireland and of the method by which they are brought to the province. The issues raised in that programme are not unique to Northern Ireland. Where reliable information exists indicating immigration offenders are at a particular address, United Kingdom Immigration Service staff in Northern Ireland take action against illegal workers there, as they do elsewhere in the United Kingdom.

During the past 12 months 68 illegal workers have been removed from Northern Ireland. Further enforcement visits to identify other illegal workers are planned.

Child Asylum Seekers

Linda Perham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many children have *(a)* been refused and *(b)* been granted asylum in the last 12 months; and what definition of child is used for this purpose. [80532]

Beverley Hughes: Data are only available for unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC), defined as principal applicants who are, or appear to be, under 18, claiming asylum in their own right and without a guardian or relative in the United Kingdom.

In the first six months of 2002, 3,070 initial decisions were made on applications lodged by UASCs aged under 18 at the time of initial decision. Of these decisions, 470 cases were refused asylum and exceptional leave to remain, 295 were granted asylum and 2,310 were granted exceptional leave to remain.

Comparable data for the six months prior to this are unavailable and would be produced only at disproportionate cost by examining individual case records.

Reliable information on initial decisions made on applications from accompanied children is not readily available and could be obtained only by examination of individual case records and is therefore available only at a disproportionate cost.

Information on unaccompanied minors is published annually in the statistical bulletin "Asylum Statistics United Kingdom", a copy of which is available in the Library and from the RDS website http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration1 .html.

EU Migrant Statistics

Mr. Lilley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will publish figures showing the *(a)* population density and *(b)* inflow of migrants in the most recent available year in each country of the EU. [80707]

Ruth Kelly: I have been asked to reply.

The information requested is the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from L. Cook to Mr. Peter Lilley, dated 20 November 2002:

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your question concerning the population density and the number of migrants for each country in the European Union. (80707)

The attached table, provided by Eurostat, the Statistical Office of the European Commission, shows the population density and the number of immigrants in each country in the European Union.

The immigration figures shown in the table are provided by the member states and are based on national definitions. Differences in the definition of migrants by different countries can be very great. These differences mean that it is hard and occasionally misleading to draw conclusions about the comparative scale of migration in the countries concerned.

Table 1: Population density and number of immigrants, European Union countries

Country	Population density[1] (Persons per sq. km)	Number of immigrants[2] (Thousands)
Austria	97.1	81.7
Belgium	337.7	[3]68.5
Denmark	124.6	52.9
Federal Republic of Germany	230.9	841.2
Finland	17.1	16.9
France	[5]109.1	[3]57.8
Greece	80.5	[4]12.6
Ireland	55.3	46.2
Italy	192.5	[3]185.1
Luxembourg	172.6	11.8
Netherlands	[5]475.2	132.9
Portugal	[5]112.5	[5]18.4
Spain	80.1	362.5
Sweden	21.7	58.7
United Kingdom	246.6	364.4

[1] The population density figures are as of 1st January 2002
[2] The number of immigrants are for the year 2000 unless otherwise shown
[3] The figures are for the year 1999
[4] The figures are for the year 1998
[5] Figures are provisional
Note:
The definitions and data sources used to record immigration vary greatly across the
countries of the European Union
Source:
Eurostat

Human Trafficking

Linda Perham: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what action he is taking to combat human trafficking and associated sex-slavery in the UK; and what assessment he has made of the size of this problem in *(a)* the UK and *(b)* London. [80535]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: We have set out our strategy to tackle trafficking of human beings, in the White Paper, Secure Borders, Safe Haven, published earlier this year. There are four main strands to the strategy:

strengthening the law;

tackling the criminals through intelligence and enforcement;

international co-operation and prevention in source and transit countries; and

dealing appropriately with the victims of trafficking.

Forming an accurate estimate of the levels of trafficking in people is problematic due to the hidden nature of the act. There is currently no accurate, reliable data in existence within the United Kingdom or the European Union. A Home Office research study 'Stopping Traffic' published in 2000, indicated that the number of women and children trafficked into the United Kingdom for the purposes of sexual exploitation, was likely to be in the range of 140 to 1,400 per year.

Illegal Immigration (East Sussex)

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what plans he has to improve precautions against illegal immigration in East Sussex. [80679]

Beverley Hughes: The Immigration Service is committed to maintaining secure borders throughout the United Kingdom and countering evasion of the immigration control. A close watch is kept on the situation in East Sussex to assess regularly the risk of persons entering the United Kingdom illegally and to ensure that any necessary action is taken. Ports in East Sussex are not currently considered to be at high risk from illegal immigration. The Immigration Service deal with illegal entrants and, in consultation with the Police and other control Authorities, will assist in the identification and prosecution of those who facilitate illegal entrants.

Immigration Policy

Mr. Lilley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many foreign spouses and fiancé(e)s were admitted to live in the UK with their British spouses in each year from 1990. [80708]

Beverley Hughes: The available information on the number of spouses admitted to the United Kingdom in each year from 1990 is given in the table.

It is not possible to identify separately those people who were admitted to live in the United Kingdom with a spouse who was a British citizen from those admitted to join a spouse who had settled in the United Kingdom but was not a British citizen.

Admissions of spouses, fiancé(e)s for a limited period prior to settlement[1], excluding EEA nationals[2], 1990 to 2001—United Kingdom

Number of persons

Category and nationality	*1990*	*1991*	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*
Husbands						
Europe[2]	—	—	370	350	310	380
Americas	—	—	890	780	880	970
Africa	—	—	580	640	740	610
Indian sub-continent	1,680	2,160	3,720	3,530	3,070	3,020
Other Asia	—	—	330	270	300	330
Oceania	—	—	640	530	550	560
Other nationalities	—	—	130	110	40	30
All nationalities[2]	4,860	5,040	6,660	6,200	5,890	5,900
Male fiancés						
Europe[2]	—	—	110	80	80	90
Americas	—	—	190	140	150	150
Africa	—	—	80	80	100	90
Indian sub-continent	500	420	290	250	150	140
Other Asia	—	—	70	60	60	60
Oceania	—	—	100	70	70	70
Other nationalities	—	—	30	30	10	10
All nationalities[2]	1,060	940	860	720	610	610
Wives						
Europe[2]	—	—	930	940	740	900
Americas	—	—	1,600	1,520	1,570	1,640
Africa	—	—	820	830	980	940
Indian sub-continent	5,040	5,310	5,360	5,040	5,050	5,060
Other Asia	—	—	1,540	1,460	1,600	1,760
Oceania	—	—	880	740	800	760
Other nationalities	—	—	380	220	80	60
All nationalities[2]	10,900	10,900	11,500	10,800	10,800	11,100
Female fiancées						
Europe[2]	—	—	260	330	240	310
Americas	—	—	350	290	380	370
Africa	—	—	100	100	100	90
Indian sub-continent	490	410	380	300	260	250
Other Asia	—	—	440	340	380	390
Oceania	—	—	120	90	90	100
Other nationalities	—	—	60	40	10	10
All nationalities[2]	1,830	1,790	1,720	1,500	1,460	1,500

Category and nationality	*1996*	*1997[3]*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000[4]*	*2001[4]*
Husbands						
Europe[2]	420	605	620	645	660	495
Americas	880	975	1,090	1,145	1,000	610
Africa	710	1,085	1,490	1,610	1,515	1,310
Indian sub-continent	3,540	5,865	7,520	4,600	6,240	5,410
Other Asia	340	405	430	460	450	455
Oceania	530	630	730	835	725	560
Other nationalities	30	35	35	25	15	20
All nationalities[2]	6,460	9,600	11,910	9,325	10,605	8,855

Category and nationality	1996	1997[3]	1998	1999	2000[4]	2001[4]
Male fiancés						
Europe[2]	90	130	105	120	100	60
Americas	160	195	175	140	160	105
Africa	80	105	140	130	100	85
Indian sub-continent	100	185	215	220	240	235
Other Asia	70	70	90	75	55	65
Oceania	80	95	125	100	90	60
Other nationalities	[5]—	5	5	5	5	—
All nationalities[2]	580	785	855	795	750	610
Wives						
Europe[2]	1,040	1,165	1,410	1,990	1,745	1,345
Americas	1,670	1,740	1,950	2,520	1,955	1,255
Africa	1,070	1,370	1,895	2,300	2,235	2,165
Indian sub-continent	5,740	6,645	8,010	6,525	8,700	8,495
Other Asia	1,880	2,250	2,665	2,980	3,310	3,480
Oceania	790	900	1,100	1,305	1,145	1,060
Other nationalities	50	50	35	50	45	60
All nationalities[2]	12,200	14,120	17,070	17,670	19,140	17,860
Female fiancées						
Europe[2]	400	485	560	665	670	445
Americas	400	445	450	490	510	255
Africa	120	105	150	130	130	115
Indian sub-continent	250	200	305	285	310	295
Other Asia	430	520	710	740	725	595
Oceania	110	130	145	140	110	70
Other nationalities	10	5	10	10	10	5
All nationalities[2]	1,710	1,880	2,330	2,460	2,475	1,775

[1] Husbands and wives seeking settlement, and fiancé(e)s, are given leave to enter for a limited period (apart from certain wives who are entitled to settlement on arrival). Settlement is granted after a year's probationary period; for those admitted as fiancé(e)s the probationary period starts after marriage.
[2] Excludes EC nationals up to 1993 and EEA nationals since 1994.
[3] Figures prior to 1997 rounded to three significant figures, figures from 1997 rounded to five.
[4] A change in procedures may have resulted in some under-recording in the fourth quarter of 2000 and the first quarter of 2001.
[5] Negligible ie five or fewer.
'—' Not available

Refugee Accommodation

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) if he will make a statement on progress on the Government's assessment of the Refugee Council 'core and cluster' model of accommodation centre; and if he will make a statement on the methods of evaluation of the different models of accommodation centre for people seeking asylum being planned by the Government; [81044]

(2) if he will define the different models of accommodation centre that the Government is planning for people seeking asylum; [81043]

(3) if he will make it his policy to adopt the Refugee Council care and cluster model of accommodating centres. [81042]

Beverley Hughes: As I announced in the House of Commons on 5 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 150W we remain committed to developing large, self-contained, out of town facilities in order to thoroughly test the on-site provision of services at accommodation centres. However, in order to test an alternative model, one of the trial centres will be smaller than 750 places and for single men only and may be located in or on the edge of an urban area. We have also made clear that our minds are not closed to other models and, in particular that we will continue to work with the Refugee Council on their "core and cluster" proposal. This would involve a series of hostels clustered around a central services core. No decisions have yet been made on the Refugee Council proposals. We will undertake a thorough evaluation of the accommodation centre trial. It will include a combination of management information, consultation with relevant people and more formal research carried out by independent researchers under contract to the Home Office. The evaluation conclusions will be publicly available, and provided to Parliament.

Animal Welfare

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what plans he has to relax regulations on the use of terminally anaesthetized animals for training surgeons; [81126]

(2) what steps he is taking formally to consult individuals and organisations on the format, layout and language of the Home Office statistics of scientific procedures on living animals [81124]

(3) what plans he has to remove from the Home Office statistics of scientific procedures on living animals, animals from GM strains which are bred but not otherwise used in regulated procedures; [81121]

(4) what plans he has to ensure that designated research establishments using animals are inspected at least once a year by an inspector from another area; [81137]

(5) what steps he is taking to encourage his EU counterparts to make development and validation of replacements for animal experiments a priority; [81134]

(6) what steps he is taking to ensure that ethical review processes relating to research using animals have external lay members, whose term of office is time-limited; [81131]

(7) what plans he has to repeal section 24 of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 in favour of a specific justification for each class of information that needs to be kept confidential; [81122]

(8) what steps he is taking to provide improved statistics on animal suffering pursuant to animal experimentation; [81125]

(9) what steps he is taking to engage in a systematic and visible search for methods involving the reduction, refinement and replacement in toxicology; [81133]

(10) what steps he is taking to enable visiting scientists and students in higher education to carry out work under the licenses of an established licence-holder in research using animals; [81128]

(11) what plans he has to subject the Home Office Inspectorate for the regulation of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 to periodic review by a body other than the Inspectorate itself; [81136]

(12) what plans he has to *(a)* strengthen the secretariat of the Animal Procedures Committee and *(b)* separate it from the Home Office regulators; [81129]

(13) what steps he is taking to encourage the Home Office Inspectorate to convene a regular forum to discuss specific scientific and welfare issues related to the use of animals in experiments; [81123]

(14) what steps he is taking to ensure a welfare assessment of new strains of animals used in experiments; [81120]

(15) what steps he is taking to simplify and reduce the length of project licenses involving animal-related research; [81127]

(16) what steps he is taking to promote the adoption of replacements and the incorporation of refinements into animal test guidelines; [81132]

(17) what plans he has to delegate interim authority from his Department to the local ethical review process when approving routine or minor amendments relating to research using animals; [81130]

(18) what steps he is taking to promote the commercial advantages of reduction, refinement and replacement in toxicology; [81135]

(19) what plans he has to make public the substantive details of anonymised project licences, describing the expected benefits of animal-related research and the harms to the animals involved after they have been approved and funded. [81138]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: These matters are all the subject of recommendations in the report published on 24 July 2002 by the House of Lords Select Committee on Animals in Scientific Procedures. The report contained a total of seven conclusions and thirty-one recommendations, all of which are being carefully and thoroughly considered. The Government will respond to the report within the six months that is provided for and there will then be a debate in the House of Lords.

PRIME MINISTER

Northern Ireland

Dr. Julian Lewis: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make a statement on the theft of sensitive documents appertaining to Northern Ireland from police and government Departments. [80915]

The Prime Minister: The police are investigating this matter at the moment. I do not want to say anything that might jeopardise that investigation.

Bishops

Keith Vaz: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the bishops on whom he has advised appointment since 1997. [81500]

The Prime Minister: I have advised on the following bishoprics since May 1997:

Diocesan Bishops
Bath and Wells
Birmingham
Bradford
Bristol
Canterbury
Carlisle
Chichester
Coventry
Ely
Exeter
Leicester
Lincoln
Liverpool
Manchester
Newcastle
Norwich
Ripon and Leeds
Sheffield
Southwark
Southwell
Suffragan/Area Bishops
Barking
Basingstoke
Bedford
Beverley
Birkenhead
Bolton
Brixworth
Buckingham
Burnley
Colchester
Doncaster
Dorchester
Dover

Dudley
Dunwich
Ebbsfleet
Edmonton
Grantham
Grimsby
Hertford
Hull
Hulme
Jarrow
Knaresborough
Lancaster
Ludlow
Lynn
Maidstone
Middleton
Penrith
Pontefract
Ramsbury
Repton
Richborough
Sherborne
Shrewsbury
St. Germans
Stockport
Taunton
Thetford
Tonbridge
Warrington
Whitby
Willesden

Children and Young People

Mr. Allen: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the Ministers in each Department with responsibility for *(a)* programmes, *(b)* policy and *(c)* legislation which makes specific reference to children and young people under the age of 18, indicating their titles and responsibilities. [80470]

The Prime Minister: Providing opportunities for the welfare and development of children and young people is a priority for Government. We have introduced a range of programmes which include legislation to support children and young people. These are delivered by a number of Ministers across Government. For example, Sure Start and the children's fund in the Department for Education and Skills, children's trusts in the Department for Health, and a range of Home Office initiatives to prevent offending, which include support to parents and families. The Treasury and Department for Work and Pensions also have significant responsibilities affecting children and young people including child support and the children's tax credit.

The children and young people's unit was established in July 2000 as a cross-cutting unit to support Government work across the full 0–19 age range. The unit reports to John Denham, Minister of State in the Home Office and the Secretary of State for Education and Skills. The Chancellor of the Exchequer chairs the Cabinet Committee on children and young people's services.

The Government recently reaffirmed its commitment to addressing the needs of the most vulnerable children by announcing a new ministerial committee, chaired by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, to oversee the development of a Green Paper on children at risk. A Green Paper will be published early next year on the whole issue of children at risk, including how to ensure that they do not take up crime, and their family, mental health and educational problems.

These initiatives are all in addition to mainstream services which cover young people, such as social services, the health service and schools. Other ministerial responsibilities in this area are set out in the "List of Ministerial Responsibilities", copies of which are available from the Vote Office, the Libraries of the House, and the Cabinet Office website: www. cabinet-office.gov.uk/central/index/lmr.htm.

Downing Street (Refurbishment)

Norman Baker: To ask the Prime Minister what plans are in place to refurbish *(a)* 10 and *(b)* 11 Downing street; what the estimated cost will be; and what mechanism exists for public scrutiny of this project. [81595]

The Prime Minister: While there are, currently, no plans to refurbish 10 and 11 Downing street, maintenance and redecoration work across the Downing street estate is part of a continuing programme. No. 10 now, as in the past, is maintained to standards appropriate to its status as a Grade 1 listed building, in consultation with English Heritage and other experts as appropriate. Bills and invoices in connection with such work are subject to audit in line with Treasury requirements.

Engagements

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list his official engagements for 20 November. [82220]

The Prime Minister: This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in the House I will have further such meetings later today. I will be travelling to Prague this afternoon to attend the NATO summit.

Environmental Matters

Norman Baker: To ask the Prime Minister if he will list the environmental matters raised by *(a)* him, *(b)* his special envoys and *(c)* his officials in discussions with foreign powers since the last General Election. [80848]

The Prime Minister: The Government at all levels has raised a range of environmental matters during discussions with foreign governments since 2001. These include air quality, chemicals, climate change, energy, forests, biodiversity, sustainable development, agriculture and water issues.

Region/local LSC	Council members from business	Council members from trade unions	Council members from education providers	Others	Total
National Council	2	—	—	2	4
South East					
Berkshire	—	—	1	—	1
Surrey	2	—	1	1	4
Kent and Medway	1	—	1	1	3
Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire	—	—	1	1	2
Hampshire Portsmouth, Southampton and the Isle of Wight	1	—	1	1	3
Sussex	3	1	2	1	7
East of England					
Bedfordshire	3	—	—	1	4
Cambridgeshire	—	—	1	1	2
Essex	—	—	—	1	1
Hertfordshire	—	—	—	—	—
Norfolk	—	—	—	1	1
Suffolk	—	—	1	1	2
North East	—	—	—	—	—
Northumberland	—	—	—	2	2
Tyne and Wear	1	—	—	1	2
County Durham	—	—	—	—	—
Tees Valley	1	—	—	—	1
East Midlands					
Derbyshire	1	—	—	—	1
Leicestershire	1	—	1	1	3
Lincolnshire and Rutland	—	—	—	—	—
Northamptonshire	—	—	1	1	2
Nottinghamshire	1	—	—	1	2
West Midlands					
Birmingham and Solihull	—	—	—	—	—
The Black Country	2	—	—	1	3
Shropshire	2	—	—	1	3
Staffordshire	1	—	—	—	1
Coventry and Warwickshire	—	—	2	2	4
Herefordshire and Worcestershire	1	—	1	—	2
North West					
Lancashire	1	—	—	—	1
Greater Manchester	2	—	1	—	3
Cheshire/Warrington	2	1	—	3	6
Cumbria	—	—	1	—	1
Greater Merseyside	—	—	—	—	—
Yorkshire and the Humber					
Humberside	—	1	—	—	1
South Yorkshire	1	—	—	—	1
West Yorkshire	1	—	—	—	1
North Yorkshire	1	—	—	—	1
South West					
Gloucestershire	—	—	—	—	—
Wiltshire and Swindon	—	—	—	—	—
Somerset	1	—	—	—	1
The West of England	1	—	—	—	1
Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole	—	—	—	—	—
Devon and Cornwall	1	—	1	1	3
London					
London North	—	—	—	1	1
London East	—	—	—	—	—
London West	1	—	—	—	1
London Central	—	—	—	1	1
London South	2	—	—	—	2

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what percentage of the members of each of the learning and skills councils represent *(a)* the business sector, *(b)* the trade unions and *(c)* the public sector. [80993]

Margaret Hodge: The information requested is provided in the following table. Members of local LSCs are not delegates of particular sectors but have been appointed for their understanding and experience of the wide variety of relevant interests in post-16 learning.

Percentage

LLSC	*Business sector*	*Trade unions*	*Public sector*
South East			
Berkshire	44	6	44
Hampshire, Portsmouth, Southampton and IOW[1]	43	7	43
Kent and Medway	31	12	56
Milton Keynes, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire[1]	54	7	47
Surrey	31	6	56
Sussex	38	—	62
East of England			
Bedfordshire and Luton[1]	47	7	47
Cambridgeshire	44	—	44
Essex[1]	40	7	47
Hertfordshire	44	6	56
Norfolk	44	6	31
Suffolk	44	12	50
North East			
County Durham	56	6	31
Northumberland[1]	83	8	8
Tees Valley	50	6	37
Tyne and Wear	44	6	37
East Midlands			
Derbyshire	31	6	44
Leicestershire[1]	47	13	33
Lincolnshire and Rutland	37	6	44
Northamptonshire	37	6	50
Nottinghamshire	37	6	44
West Midlands			
Birmingham and Solihull[1]	47	7	27
The Black Country[1]	40	7	47
Coventry and Warwickshire	50	6	44
Herefordshire and Worcestershire[1]	54	8	31
Shropshire	50	6	37
Staffordshire	44	6	37
North West			
Cheshire/Warrington[1]	57	—	43
Cumbria	56	6	31
Lancashire[1]	47	7	40
Greater Manchester	50	12	31
Greater Merseyside	44	6	37
Yorkshire and the Humber			
South Yorkshire[1]	40	13	53
North Yorkshire	37	6	50
Humberside[1]	53	—	40
West Yorkshire[1]	43	7	43
South West			
Devon and Cornwall	50	6	37
Bournemouth, Dorset and Poole[1]	54	7	40
Gloucestershire[1]	47	13	40
Somerset	50	6	31
Wiltshire and Swindon	37	6	50
West of England[1]	40	7	40
London			
London Central[1]	53	6	33
London East	50	6	25
London North[1]	47	6	33
London South[1]	36	7	43
London West[1]	47	13	26

[1] Councils with outstanding vacancies. Figures provided liable to some distortion

Mr. Brady: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what percentage of members of each learning and skills council represent *(a)* manufacturing, *(b)* engineering and *(c)* service industries. [80994]

Margaret Hodge: The information requested is not available. Members are appointed to local councils for their understanding and experience of the wide variety of relevant interests in post-16 learning.

Pupil Capacity

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what additional funding was made available to schools in *(a)* the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead and *(b)* Wokingham district to increase pupil capacity after 18 July. [81757]

Mr. Miliband: None. Guidance for the 2003–04 Basic Need round, to support the provision of new pupil places, was issued at the end of July. It invited local education authorities to make bids by 30 September. Neither the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead nor Wokingham district made applications. The Department will be announcing Basic Need allocations to LEAs in December.

School Places

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what recent estimate he has made of the additional number of school places that will be required in *(a)* the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead and *(b)* Wokingham district as a result of the Government's plan for housing. [81758]

Mr. Miliband: It is for local education authorities to plan and keep under review the supply of school places in the light of proposed housing development, so as to ensure that there is sufficient provision to meet demand. The regional planning guidance for the South East assists local education authorities in the region to do this. Where an LEA can demonstrate overall growth in the need for school places it may apply to my Department for capital funding.

School Sport

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills (1) how many hours of the school week are devoted to sport in UK primary and secondary schools; [80978]

(2) what proposals he has to lengthen the time devoted to sport in schools in the UK. [80979]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Physical Education (PE) is compulsory within the National Curriculum in England at all Key Stages for all pupils. Schools must provide physical education (PE) in accordance with the subject's programme of study. Guidance on curriculum planning, including for PE, published by the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority and the Department for Education and Skills, recommends that the programmes of study require a minimum of 75 minutes per week at Key Stages 1 and 2, and 90 minutes per week at Key Stage 3.

The Government are committed to all children in England having at least two hours of high quality PE and school sport a week, within and outside of the curriculum. A joint Department for Education and Skills and Department for Culture, Media and Sport Public Service Agreement target—published 15 July—seeks to enhance the take-up of sporting opportunities by 5 to 16-year-olds by increasing the percentage of schoolchildren who spend a minimum of two hours each week on PE and school sport within and beyond the curriculum from 25 per cent. in 2002 to 75 per cent. by 2006. £459 million will be invested over the next three years to deliver this target. Spearheading action will be a significant expansion of the specialist sports college and school sport co-ordinator programmes.

Evidence from the Youth Sport Trust, Sport England and the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority indicates that a quarter of schools in England—those within school sport co-ordinator partnerships—are offering children aged 5 to 16 access to at least two hours' PE and school sport. All these partnerships will complete an annual data collection exercise this month. This will provide robust, comprehensive and in-depth information on the number of pupils with access to two hours' PE and school sport. Early messages from this will be available before the end of the year. The House will be informed of the results.

Sexual Relationship Education

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what training provision is planned for teachers regarding sexual relationship education; and if he will make a statement. [80545]

Mr. Miliband: In April 2003, we will roll out a professional development programme for teachers of Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE). The programme will recognise effective teaching of the generic skills of PSHE, with Sex and Relationship Education (SRE) being addressed as a specialist module based on knowledge and understanding. The development of the programme supports our view that effective SRE is essential if young people are to make responsible and well-informed decisions about their lives. We expect up to 500 teachers to participate in the first year of the programme.

From September 2002, those awarded qualified teacher status must demonstrate that they are familiar with the national curriculum framework for PSHE, including sex and relationship education, for the age range they are trained to teach. The new standards for initial teacher training also open up opportunities for trainees to have PSHE as a specialism.

Top-up Fees

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills what recent assessment he has made of the potential impact of university top-up fees on the drive to increase participation in higher education. [81505]

Margaret Hodge: We have announced our intention to publish in January a strategy document setting out our vision for the development and reform of higher education, including the outcome of the review of student support. It would not be right to say now what options we are considering or what analyses we have undertaken.

Truancy (Essex)

Mr. Ivan Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he will list the levels of truancy in Essex in each year since 1997. [80891]

Mr. Miliband: Percentage of half days missed due to unauthorised absence in maintained primary and secondary schools in Essex since 1997.

Year	*Primary schools*	*Secondary schools*
1996–97	0.4	0.8
1997–98	0.4	0.8
1998–99	0.4	0.9
1999–2000	0.3	0.9
2000–01	0.4	0.8
2001–02[1]	0.4	0.9

[1]Early statistics

The 1997 figures for Essex are not directly comparable with the later years because of the local government reorganisation that took place in 1998.

University Fees

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Education and Skills if he plans to introduce a differential fees regime between university applicants who originate from independent schools and those who originate from maintained schools; and if he will make a statement. [80752]

Margaret Hodge: We have no such plans.

HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION

Congestion Charging

Mr. Chope: To ask the hon. Member for Roxburgh and Berwickshire, representing the House of Commons Commission (1) what the policy is of the Commission in relation to the reimbursement of Central London road user charges incurred by its employees; [81890]

(2) what the estimated cost is to the Commission of the Central London Road User Charging Scheme for *(a)* 17 February 2003 to 31 March 2003, and *(b)* 1 April 2003 to 31 March 2004. [81889]

Mr. Kirkwood *[holding answer 19 November 2002]:* The Commission is keeping an eye on developments, but has no current plans to reimburse employees.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Business Consultation (Buckinghamshire)

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will list the business organisations in *(a)* Chesham and Amersham and *(b)* Buckinghamshire with which she consults on matters of relevance to the business sector. [81175]

Alan Johnson *[holding answer 19 November 2002]:* The Government Office for the South East, who are responsible for carrying out work on behalf of my Department, liaise with local business support organisations such as the Thames Valley Economic Partnership, Local Chambers of Commerce, local Confederation of British Industry and Institute of Directors, when they need to survey opinion on Office of the DPM issues affecting business.

GOSE also has good links with the Regional Development Agency (SEEDA), and the local business link (Business Link Solutions) who have close relationships with the business sector.

GOSE is also encouraging the business sector to become involved in the local strategic partnerships. The Chiltern district council's LSP has both a local business, Amersham International, and a representative form Aylesbury Chamber of Commerce as members.

BAE Systems

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what investigations have taken place to determine how BAE Systems spare parts were supplied to the Zimbabwean Defence Forces earlier this year; and whether she has established if such spare parts were granted on export licence by the UK Government. [81322]

Nigel Griffiths: I refer the hon. Member to the reply from my right hon. Friend the Defence Secretary, to my hon. Friend, the Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Paul Farrelly) on 4 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 11.

Since the introduction of the UK arms embargo on 12 May 2000, no standard individual export licences or open individual export licences have been issued, for the proposed export of spare parts for the Hawk aircraft, where the end users were in Zimbabwe.

I refer the hon. Member to the reply from my right hon. Friend the Member for Livingston (Mr. Cook), the then Foreign Secretary, to my hon. Friend, the Member for Barnsley, East and Mexborough (Jeff Ennis) on 12 May 2000, *Official Report*, columns 493–94W.

Broadband

Jim Knight: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what progress is being made to increase access to higher bandwidth broadband in rural areas. [81361]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 19 November 2002]:* Satellite services make broadband available across the country. Added to this some 67 per cent. of the households in the UK now have access to a mass-market terrestrial broadband service. This is ahead of countries such as France and Italy.

The market continues to make progress in extending the availability of affordable broadband through such initiatives as the demand registration schemes run by BT and by Liberty Broadband. We believe that the market-led progress will continue as new technologies including additional wireless services become available and satellite services become more affordable.

We believe, however, that in some areas Government may have a role to play. Some schemes including European structural funds have already made an impact on the availability of broadband (e.g. the ACTNOW project in Cornwall).

The Government has also committed £30 million for pilot projects to help regional development agencies and devolved administrations learn what will work in extending availability and take-up. These funds are starting to make an impact in rural communities such as Buckfastleigh in Devon and Alston in Cumbria.

There is scope for further impact to be made in increasing private sector investment and the availability of broadband by the use of public sector demand. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister announced yesterday that the outcome of the Spending Review 2002 shows that a total of approximately £6 billion will be invested in electronic government—including £1 billion towards high-speed broadband connectivity. Existing funds for regional economic development (and RDAs will have £1.8 billion in 2003–04 for this purpose) can also make a contribution where lack of broadband is a barrier to economic development. That is why I announced in June the intention to establish a regional broadband unit to use the public sector's spending power to boost availability and take-up in rural areas.

Mr. Derek Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how and in what way SEEDA has allocated its broadband funds; and what SEEDA's criteria are in allocating funds for broadband provision in the poorest wards in Kent. [81766]

Mr. Timms *[holding answer 19 November 2002]*: SEEDA programmes are targeted at both supply and demand side issues including direct touch involvement in mainstream technologies (Fibre, DSL, Wireless and Satellite), new technologies (powerline transmission, VDSL, third generation mobile and metro Ethernet), application pilot programmes and broadband promotion. In addition SEEDA is working with other national, regional and local stakeholders.

SEEDA's criteria for allocating funds are shaped by the Regional Economic strategy and its Corporate plan as agreed with partners. Both documents identify the 119 most deprived wards in the Region as priority areas, requiring special attention and investment. Of these, 48 are in Kent and 6 in Medway.

Chemicals Policy Review

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what studies her Department has made of the possible effects of the European Commission's Chemicals Policy Review on the

international competitiveness of *(a)* the UK chemical industry itself and *(b)* the rest of the UK manufacturing industry. [81102]

Alan Johnson *[holding answer 19 November 2002]:* My right hon. Friend, the Minister of State for the Environment, has overall responsibility for the EU Chemicals Strategy, including responsibility for the assessment of the regulatory impact of those proposals. The Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) is actively involved in the development of policy on this issue. In May 2001, the Government prepared a preliminary regulatory impact assessment of the proposals in the European Commission's White Paper "Strategy for a Future Chemicals Policy", COM(2001) 88. A further regulatory impact assessment will be required when proposals for the European Commission's legislation are available, and DTI will be fully involved in determining the scope and content of that assessment. It will include an assessment of the implications of the proposed legislation for the international competitiveness of the UK chemicals industry and other manufacturing sectors that use chemicals in their processes and products. The Government has already consulted interested stakeholders about the specification for the regulatory impact assessment. In addition, the Government will consider what further analysis may be needed to ensure that the wider implications for competitiveness (for example, at the macro-economic level) are taken into account.

Energy Generation

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what percentage of England's energy needs have been delivered by *(a)* gas generation, *(b)* other fossil fuel generation, *(c)* nuclear generation, *(d)* renewable sources, excluding hydro power and *(e)* hydro power in each year since 1972. [80852]

Mr. Wilson: The available information is shown in the following table and covers electricity supplied in the United Kingdom as whole. Figures are not compiled on an England basis.

Electricity supplied by fuel, 1972 to 2001 [1]

				Percentage			
	Total GWh	*Gas* [2]	*Other fossil fuels*	*Nuclear*	*Renewables excluding hydro*	*Hydro*	*Total*
1972	245,150	—	87.8	10.5	—	1.7	100
1973	262,638	—	89.0	9.3	—	1.7	100
1974	254,147	—	86.6	11.5	—	1.9	100
1975	253,714	—	87.6	10.4	—	1.9	100
1976	257,707	—	85.9	12.1	—	2.0	100
1977	263,615	—	84.9	13.1	—	2.0	100
1978	268,804	—	86.0	12.1	—	1.9	100
1979	280,162	—	86.2	11.9	—	1.9	100
1980	266,312	—	86.0	12.1	—	1.9	100
1981	259,939	—	85.2	12.8	—	2.1	100
1982	255,083	—	82.6	15.2	—	2.2	100
1983	259,361	—	80.6	16.9	—	2.5	100
1984	264,148	—	79.9	17.9	—	2.3	100
1985	277,922	—	78.2	19.3	—	2.4	100
1986	281,469	—	79.1	18.4	—	2.4	100
1987	282,512	—	80.7	17.1	—	2.2	100
1988	288,599	—	78.3	19.3	—	2.4	100
1989	294,322	—	75.9	21.6	0.2	2.2	100
1990	300,128	0.1	77.8	19.5	0.2	2.4	100
1991	302,764	0.2	76.8	20.7	0.3	2.0	100
1992	300,804	1.1	73.2	23.0	0.3	2.3	100
1993	303,816	7.6	63.4	26.7	0.4	1.9	100
1994	308,987	12.2	59.3	25.9	0.6	2.1	100
1995	319,909	19.8	52.4	25.2	0.6	2.0	100
1996	334,787	24.7	47.4	25.6	0.8	1.5	100
1997	334,106	32.8	37.9	26.7	1.0	1.7	100
1998	345,293	33.7	37.0	26.2	1.2	1.9	100
1999	351,444	39.7	31.6	24.9	1.4	2.3	100
2000	360,975	40.2	34.5	21.7	1.5	2.1	100
2001	368,451	37.8	36.3	22.5	1.6	1.7	100

[1] Electricity supplied is here measured on a "gross" basis, ie hydro includes production from pumped storage stations and "other fuels" include the electricity supplied for use in pumping at pumped storage stations.
[2] Prior to 1995 figures are for Combined Cycle Gas Turbines only.
Source:
Department of Trade and Industry

Equal Treatment at Work Directive

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she next expects to meet representatives of small businesses to discuss the impact of the equal treatment at work directive. [81564]

Nigel Griffiths: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry and I hold regular meetings with the small business community. These meetings offer many opportunities for business to ask questions about this area of equal treatment legislation.

Renewable Energy

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what information she has collated on the amount of energy within each OECD country generated from renewable sources in each year since 1990 and what the change in total energy consumption was in each case, taking 1990 as a baseline figure of 100. [81592]

Mr. Wilson: The available information is shown in tables, copies of which will be placed in the Library, and cover electricity generated from renewable sources, and electricity consumption in each OECD country. The data are compiled by the International Energy Agency.

Thailand

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what discussions she has had with *(a)* BAE Systems and *(b)* the Government of Thailand regarding *(i)* proposed sale of defence equipment to Thailand and (ii) the promotion of Thai poultry exports. [81039]

Nigel Griffiths: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry has had no discussions with BAE Systems on this issue. However, this Government fully supports UK industry in its legitimate defence exports. In relation to the Kingdom of Thailand, HMG is supporting BAE Systems to work with the Government of the Kingdom of Thailand to assist with the modernisation of the Royal Thai Armed Forces. In this connection, I understand they have set in motion the negotiation on a major programme of offset, technology transfer and inward investment, collectively known as "Economic Compensation", to be undertaken to provide Thailand with substantial and sustainable investment in areas such as agriculture, health, education and industrial participation.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry met the Prime Minister of Thailand, Dr. Thaksin Shinawatra, in May of this year. At that meeting, she told him she was grateful for Thailand's efforts in implementing safeguards in relation to its exports of chicken and shrimp.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Housing Benefit

Mr. Soley: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will conduct a study of the relationship between high value rented properties and the adequacy of housing benefit as part of the trials being carried out on changes to housing benefit. [81550]

Malcolm Wicks: We use local reference rents to ensure that the overriding principle that people receiving should not have their rent met in full if it exceeds the broad average for the area is adhered to. Local reference rents and the localities to which they apply are set by independent rent officers to reflect local housing market conditions. Requests for re-determinations are rare which indicates that local references rents do not cause widespread problems for benefit recipients.

The new standard local housing allowance will be based on local reference rents and will be piloted in up to 10 pathfinder local authorities selected to reflect a wide range of housing market conditions, including areas with high value rented properties. In consultation with independent researchers, we are drawing up a rigorous evaluation strategy to test the effectiveness of the allowance in enabling housing benefit recipients in the deregulated private rented sector to make informed choices over their accommodation.

Dr. Naysmith: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will introduce a de minimis rule in implementing the housing benefit changes due in April 2003, whereby a small charity, with less than 10 units, may continue to have its 'support' costs included in housing benefit payments. [81563]

Malcolm Wicks: Housing benefit is intended to help people on low incomes to pay for rented accommodation. It is not intended to provide the full range of support services vulnerable people need to enable them to live independently in the community. The Supporting People arrangements to be introduced in April 2003 will bring together resources from several existing programmes, including housing benefit, to create a coherent funding and planning framework for housing-related support services, based on a grant to local councils. The new arrangements will promote greater choice and flexibility for service users.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Water Industry

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she next plans to meet the representatives of the water industry. [81650]

Mr. Morley: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has meetings with representatives of the water industry from time to time but has no such engagements in her diary now.

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to change the system of water metering. [81649]

Mr. Morley: The Water Industry Act 1999 sets in place the Governments policies on water metering.

The Government have no plans to amend that legislation.

Bovine TB

Mr. Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs where the bovine TB gamma interferon tests are being held. [81070]

Mr. Morley *[holding answer 18 November 2002]:* Defra will be aiming to recruit approximately 660 herds in Wales and the following six English counties: Staffordshire, Cheshire, Derbyshire, Herefordshire, Worcestershire and Shropshire.

The project commenced in early November and the first herds are now being recruited.

BSE

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps she is taking to ensure her Department receives EU funding related to BSE. [81145]

Mr. Morley: Defra has written to the European Commission seeking a review of the recent decision not to grant funding for the UK's TSE and other animal disease eradication and control measures in 2003. We await a response.

Composting

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many proposals for composting initiatives have been turned down by the Environment Agency on the grounds of the Animal By-Products Order which prohibits the composting of kitchen and catering waste. [80511]

Mr. Morley: Defra and the local authorities are the competent authorities with respect to the Animal By-Products Order and it is not the responsibility of the Environment Agency to enforce the requirements of the Order. The agency set out its position with respect to the Order in a position statement which was published in October 2001.

Where the agency receives applications which may be affected by the Animal By-Products Order, it makes applicants aware of the Order and notifies the local authority concerned.

Consultancies

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list external *(a)* public relations/communications companies, *(b)* advertising and marketing companies, *(c)* management consultancies, *(d)* accounting companies, *(e)* banking firms, *(f)* individual consultants and *(g)* other specialist consultancies used by her Department since June 2001; what actions those consultancies or companies have performed within her Department; and what costs have been incurred through use of these consultancies/companies. [80867]

Alun Michael: The information requested is not readily available and can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Diversification

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many, and what proportion, of farms have diversified in each of the last 10 years, broken down by region. [81151]

Mr. Morley: A research study on diversification is currently being undertaken for my Department and is due to be published soon. This will include a regional breakdown and an assessment of past and future trends in the level of diversification.

I will write with details of the report once it has been published.

Environment Agency Cars

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many cars are owned or leased by the Environment Agency for their employees. [81013]

Mr. Meacher: The Environment Agency owns or leases 3,150 cars for its employees.

Flooding

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the impact on home values and insurance costs of the published maps of the Environment Agency showing properties at risk of flooding. [81025]

Mr. Morley: No assessment has been made of the impact of these maps on insurance costs. The Environment Agency have always made it clear that their maps show the indicative floodplain area, not flood risk or definitive flood boundaries, and are based on land topography taking no account of the defences which are in place. The insurance industry is aware of this, and of the need to use the maps with considerable caution.

It is advisable for any prospective purchaser of a property on a flood plain to obtain further specific detail of flooding risk from the Environment Agency. This should be done as part of the normal conveyancing process.

The agency are developing a National Flood and Coastal Defence Database, with funding from Defra. The aim of the project is to provide a single, easily accessible definitive store for all data on flood and coastal defences which should assist insurers when making commercial decisions based on risk. Additionally, new maps indicating flood risk are being developed, to which the insurance industry will have access.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the Department's budget is for flood relief measures in 2002–03. [81017]

Mr. Morley: Following a recent re-allocation of budgets within Defra, those for funding of flood and coastal defence measures undertaken by operating authorities have been increased to £124 million. Defra also provides funding of £4.5 million for the Storm Tide Forecasting Service and £2.5 million on research and development.

Environmental Policy

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what mechanisms exist to ensure environmental policy set by her Department is reflected in decisions taken by *(a)* the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, *(b)* the DfID and *(c)* the DTI. [81590]

Mr. Meacher: Policy proposals that specifically relate to environmental or sustainable development issues are considered by the Ministerial Committee for the Environment (ENV), Ministerial Sub-Committee on

European Issues (EP) or World Summit on Sustainable Development (MISC18) Cabinet Committees as appropriate. The Cabinet Sub-Committee of Green Ministers ENV(G) also considers the impact on sustainable development of Government policies. FCO, DFID and DTI are represented on all of these committees and play a full part in them.

In addition, Cabinet Office guidance for all Cabinet Committees requires that all Cabinet papers or letters to colleagues explain how proposals meet the economic, social and environmental objectives of sustainable development, and specifically, any significant costs and benefits to the environment.

At working level, the Guidance Checklist for Policy Makers housed on the CMPS Policy Hub is the main mechanism for ensuring that all Departments are aware of environmental appraisal requirements. DEFRA and DTI are among Departments currently piloting new integrated policy appraisal tools which aim to ensure that environmental impacts are considered alongside social and economic impacts.

Farmers

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the average age of *(a)* entrant, *(b)* current and *(c)* departing farmers was in each of the last 15 years, broken down by region. [81152]

Mr. Morley: Information on the age of farmers is collected four times each decade as part of the EC Farm Structure Surveys. The information readily available is given in the table. Information is not collected on the ages of entrant and departing farmers.

	1990	*1993*	*1995*	*1997*	*2000*
England	53	53	54	53	54
North	52	53	53	53	53
Yorks/Humberside	52	52	53	53	54
East Midlands	53	54	54	53	54
East Anglia	53	54	54	54	54
South East	54	54	55	54	55
South West	53	53	54	53	54
West Midlands	53	54	54	54	55
North West	53	52	54	53	54

Source:
EC Farm Structure Surveys

Footpaths

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the orders to be drafted relating to Bisham No. 9 footpath, when they will be published and if she will make a statement. [81756]

Alun Michael: Two orders will be drafted:

(a) an order under section 26 of the Highways Act 1980 to create a new footpath over the alternative route proposed by the Ramblers Association, and

(b) an order under section 118 of the Highways Act 1980 to extinguish the part of footpath Bisham No.9 which will be rendered redundant by the new path.

We are currently consulting the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead about the technical aspects of the orders and we expect to publish them next month. The orders will be open to objection and any objections duly made must be considered by the Secretary of State.

Funding Applications

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many late applications for EU and other funding, broken down by category, have occurred in her Department and its predecessors since 1997; and if she will list them by amount. [81144]

Alun Michael: Such detailed information is not readily available. I will write to the hon. Member with details as soon as it has been collated.

Global Warming

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the estimated total cost of global warming to the British economy was in each year since 1997. [80875]

Mr. Meacher: Estimates for the total cost of global warming to the British economy during this period are not available. The Department has however sponsored preliminary research by Environmental Resources Management Ltd. to estimate the cost of adapting to climate change in key sectors such as water and flooding. Copies of this report have been placed in the House of Commons Library.

In addition, the Association of British Insurers has estimated that weather damage claims associated with the current climate cost an average of £710 million per year over the period 1998–89 to 1998–99. The damage costs associated with extreme weather are likely to rise as such events become more frequent in future due to climate change.

Green Ministers

Jane Griffiths: : To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when the Green Ministers have met since June 2001. [81769]

Mr. Meacher: Following the general election in June 2001, the previously informal Green Ministers Committee was upgraded to a Cabinet Sub-Committee of ENV. It is established practice under exemption two of Part II of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information not to disclose information relating to the proceedings of Cabinet Committees.

However, progress made by ENV(G), and its parent committee ENV, on the contribution of all Departments to sustainable development is made public annually through the Sustainable Development in Government Report (the successor to the Greening Government reports). The next report is due to be published shortly. In addition, key developments during the year are posted on the Sustainable Development in Government website, http://www.sustainable-development.gov.uk/sdig/index.htm (launched in July 2002). The Environment Audit Committee is of course already free to call for reports and evidence at any time.

BSE

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps she is taking to ensure her Department receives EU funding related to BSE. [81145]

Mr. Morley: Defra has written to the European Commission seeking a review of the recent decision not to grant funding for the UK's TSE and other animal disease eradication and control measures in 2003. We await a response.

Composting

Mr. Sayeed: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many proposals for composting initiatives have been turned down by the Environment Agency on the grounds of the Animal By-Products Order which prohibits the composting of kitchen and catering waste. [80511]

Mr. Morley: Defra and the local authorities are the competent authorities with respect to the Animal By-Products Order and it is not the responsibility of the Environment Agency to enforce the requirements of the Order. The agency set out its position with respect to the Order in a position statement which was published in October 2001.

Where the agency receives applications which may be affected by the Animal By-Products Order, it makes applicants aware of the Order and notifies the local authority concerned.

Consultancies

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list external *(a)* public relations/communications companies, *(b)* advertising and marketing companies, *(c)* management consultancies, *(d)* accounting companies, *(e)* banking firms, *(f)* individual consultants and *(g)* other specialist consultancies used by her Department since June 2001; what actions those consultancies or companies have performed within her Department; and what costs have been incurred through use of these consultancies/companies. [80867]

Alun Michael: The information requested is not readily available and can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Diversification

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many, and what proportion, of farms have diversified in each of the last 10 years, broken down by region. [81151]

Mr. Morley: A research study on diversification is currently being undertaken for my Department and is due to be published soon. This will include a regional breakdown and an assessment of past and future trends in the level of diversification.

I will write with details of the report once it has been published.

Environment Agency Cars

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many cars are owned or leased by the Environment Agency for their employees. [81013]

Mr. Meacher: The Environment Agency owns or leases 3,150 cars for its employees.

Flooding

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of the impact on home values and insurance costs of the published maps of the Environment Agency showing properties at risk of flooding. [81025]

Mr. Morley: No assessment has been made of the impact of these maps on insurance costs. The Environment Agency have always made it clear that their maps show the indicative floodplain area, not flood risk or definitive flood boundaries, and are based on land topography taking no account of the defences which are in place. The insurance industry is aware of this, and of the need to use the maps with considerable caution.

It is advisable for any prospective purchaser of a property on a flood plain to obtain further specific detail of flooding risk from the Environment Agency. This should be done as part of the normal conveyancing process.

The agency are developing a National Flood and Coastal Defence Database, with funding from Defra. The aim of the project is to provide a single, easily accessible definitive store for all data on flood and coastal defences which should assist insurers when making commercial decisions based on risk. Additionally, new maps indicating flood risk are being developed, to which the insurance industry will have access.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the Department's budget is for flood relief measures in 2002–03. [81017]

Mr. Morley: Following a recent re-allocation of budgets within Defra, those for funding of flood and coastal defence measures undertaken by operating authorities have been increased to £124 million. Defra also provides funding of £4.5 million for the Storm Tide Forecasting Service and £2.5 million on research and development.

Environmental Policy

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what mechanisms exist to ensure environmental policy set by her Department is reflected in decisions taken by *(a)* the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, *(b)* the DfID and *(c)* the DTI. [81590]

Mr. Meacher: Policy proposals that specifically relate to environmental or sustainable development issues are considered by the Ministerial Committee for the Environment (ENV), Ministerial Sub-Committee on

European Issues (EP) or World Summit on Sustainable Development (MISC18) Cabinet Committees as appropriate. The Cabinet Sub-Committee of Green Ministers ENV(G) also considers the impact on sustainable development of Government policies. FCO, DFID and DTI are represented on all of these committees and play a full part in them.

In addition, Cabinet Office guidance for all Cabinet Committees requires that all Cabinet papers or letters to colleagues explain how proposals meet the economic, social and environmental objectives of sustainable development, and specifically, any significant costs and benefits to the environment.

At working level, the Guidance Checklist for Policy Makers housed on the CMPS Policy Hub is the main mechanism for ensuring that all Departments are aware of environmental appraisal requirements. DEFRA and DTI are among Departments currently piloting new integrated policy appraisal tools which aim to ensure that environmental impacts are considered alongside social and economic impacts.

Farmers

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the average age of *(a)* entrant, *(b)* current and *(c)* departing farmers was in each of the last 15 years, broken down by region. [81152]

Mr. Morley: Information on the age of farmers is collected four times each decade as part of the EC Farm Structure Surveys. The information readily available is given in the table. Information is not collected on the ages of entrant and departing farmers.

	1990	*1993*	*1995*	*1997*	*2000*
England	53	53	54	53	54
North	52	53	53	53	53
Yorks/Humberside	52	52	53	53	54
East Midlands	53	54	54	53	54
East Anglia	53	54	54	54	54
South East	54	54	55	54	55
South West	53	53	54	53	54
West Midlands	53	54	54	54	55
North West	53	52	54	53	54

Source:
EC Farm Structure Surveys

Footpaths

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will list the orders to be drafted relating to Bisham No. 9 footpath, when they will be published and if she will make a statement. [81756]

Alun Michael: Two orders will be drafted:

(a) an order under section 26 of the Highways Act 1980 to create a new footpath over the alternative route proposed by the Ramblers Association, and

(b) an order under section 118 of the Highways Act 1980 to extinguish the part of footpath Bisham No.9 which will be rendered redundant by the new path.

We are currently consulting the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead about the technical aspects of the orders and we expect to publish them next month. The orders will be open to objection and any objections duly made must be considered by the Secretary of State.

Funding Applications

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many late applications for EU and other funding, broken down by category, have occurred in her Department and its predecessors since 1997; and if she will list them by amount. [81144]

Alun Michael: Such detailed information is not readily available. I will write to the hon. Member with details as soon as it has been collated.

Global Warming

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the estimated total cost of global warming to the British economy was in each year since 1997. [80875]

Mr. Meacher: Estimates for the total cost of global warming to the British economy during this period are not available. The Department has however sponsored preliminary research by Environmental Resources Management Ltd. to estimate the cost of adapting to climate change in key sectors such as water and flooding. Copies of this report have been placed in the House of Commons Library.

In addition, the Association of British Insurers has estimated that weather damage claims associated with the current climate cost an average of £710 million per year over the period 1998–89 to 1998–99. The damage costs associated with extreme weather are likely to rise as such events become more frequent in future due to climate change.

Green Ministers

Jane Griffiths: : To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when the Green Ministers have met since June 2001. [81769]

Mr. Meacher: Following the general election in June 2001, the previously informal Green Ministers Committee was upgraded to a Cabinet Sub-Committee of ENV. It is established practice under exemption two of Part II of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information not to disclose information relating to the proceedings of Cabinet Committees.

However, progress made by ENV(G), and its parent committee ENV, on the contribution of all Departments to sustainable development is made public annually through the Sustainable Development in Government Report (the successor to the Greening Government reports). The next report is due to be published shortly. In addition, key developments during the year are reported on the Sustainable Development in Government website, http://www.sustainable-development.gov.uk/sdig/index.htm (launched in July 2002). The Environment Audit Committee is of course already free to call for reports and evidence at any time.

Greenhouse Gases

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the average *(a)* consumption of energy by and *(b)* emission of greenhouse gases from the average family house was in each year since 1997. [80865]

Mr. Meacher: The information is as follows:

	Average UK household energy consumption (GJ)	*Average UK household carbon dioxide emissions (tonnes CO_2)*	*Average UK household greenhouse gas emissions (tonnes CO_2 equiv.)*
1997	77.2	5.66	6.27
1998	78.9	5.73	6.44
1999	78.1	5.60	6.22
2000	78.9	5.63	6.36
2001	81.3	6.07	—

The greenhouse gas figures are higher than those for CO_2 alone since they include indirect emissions of methane attributable to household use of gas and of coal-and gas-generated electricity.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimate she has made of the percentage of greenhouse gas emissions which emanate from *(a)* the US, *(b)* other OECD countries and *(c)* developing countries; and what this represents in each category as emissions per person. [80876]

Mr. Meacher: The International Energy Agency has published global greenhouse gas emissions estimates by country for 1995. These data suggest that in that year the United States and other OECD countries accounted for around 20 per cent. and 25 per cent. of global greenhouse gas emissions respectively. Developing countries accounted for around 45 per cent. Emissions per capita were around 7, 3 and 1 tonnes of carbon equivalent per person averaged over the US, other OECD countries and developing countries respectively. These estimates include all greenhouse gases covered by the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change and the Kyoto Protocol. They do not include the countries with economies in transition in Central and Eastern Europe which in 1995 accounted for the remaining 10 per cent. of global emissions, with emissions per capita of about 3 tonnes of carbon equivalent.

Hunting

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what discussions her Department has held with the authors of the Joint Universities Study on Deer Hunting (The physiological response of red deer (Cervus elaphus) to prolonged exercise undertaken during hunting, 1998) about the physiological effects on deer which *(a)* escape after being hunted and *(b)* are hunted and shot; [80834]

(2) what estimates her Department has made of the size of the annual cull of *(a)* foxes, *(b)* hares, *(c)* deer and *(d)* mink; [80836]

(3) what plans she has to establish a national strategy for the management of *(a)* foxes, *(b)* hares, *(c)* deer and *(d)* mink; [80835]

(4) what studies her Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated into the economic damage caused by the deer population to root crops and grass by grazing, trampling and lying; and what assessment her Department has made of trends over the last 10 years; [80829]

(5) what studies her Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated into the economic cost of agricultural damage caused by *(i)* foxes, (ii) hares, (iii) deer and (iv) mink; [80832]

(6) what studies her Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated into the *(i)* fox, (ii) hare, (iii) mink and (iv) deer (1) red, (2) fallow, (3) roe, (4) sika, (5) muntjac and (6) Chinese water deer populations in England and Wales; and what estimates have been made of current populations compared to those 10 years ago; [80828]

(7) what studies her Department has commissioned into the agricultural damage caused by badgers; [80833]

(8) what studies her Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated into the predation of *(i)* water voles and (ii) fish by mink; [80831]

(9) what studies her Department has *(a)* commissioned and *(b)* evaluated into negative physiological effects on *(i)* foxes, (ii) hares and (iii) mink which escape after being hunted. [80837]

Alun Michael: Our objective in respect of *(a)* foxes, *(b)* hares, *(c)* deer and *(d)* mink is to permit their humane management where they are in conflict with agriculture, forestry, food, fisheries or property interests.

Evidence relating to the physiological responses of hunted deer was presented to the Department at the Hunting with Dogs, Hearings on the Evidence (9–11 September 2002) by Professor Roger Harris of University College Chichester. His written and oral evidence related to his own studies and those of Professor Bateson and the Joint Universities Group. Professor Bateson's work was also presented to the inquiry led by Lord Burns and discussed at length with the Burns inquiry.

The following studies have been evaluated by the Department to assess the economic cost of agricultural damage caused by:

(i) Foxes

Dr. Piran White of the University of York presented evidence on the costs of agricultural damage associated with foxes to the Hunting with Dogs, Hearings on the Evidence (9–11 Sept 2002). This was based on two particular publications: White P.C.L, Groves, H.L, Savery, J.R., Coningtoq, J. and Hatchings, M.R. (2000) Fox predation as a cause of lamb mortality on hill farms. Veterinary Record 747:33–37: and Moberly, R.L (2002) The costs of foxes to agricultural interests in Britain. PhD Thesis, University of York.

The Countryside Alliance submitted written evidence to the hearings that included details of surveys to assess the impact of fox predation among sheep breeding flocks in England and Wales undertaken by Produce Studies Ltd.

Previous data on the occurrence of fox killing on sheep farms, was submitted by The Game Conservancy Trust (Reynolds 2000). A review of literature by the Central Science Laboratory has included: Lloyd, H.G. (1980) The red fox. Batsford, London. MacDonald, D.W. (1984) A questionnaire survey of farmers' opinions and actions towards wildlife on farmlands. In Agriculture and the Environment (ed D. Jenkins) ITE Publications. MacDonald, D.W. (1987) Running with the fox. Unwin Hyman, London 224pp. Reynolds, J.C. (2000) Fox control in the countryside. The Game Conservancy Trust. The then Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food funded the Central Science Laboratory to conduct a literature review on 'The impact of the fox in Rural and Urban Britain'. The report reviewed the literature on: population status and distribution, trends in the fox populations, economic and environmental damage by foxes, methods of fox control and management, and their effectiveness.

(ii) Deer

The Department has funded "A review of Lowland deer" (CSL and R.J. Putman). This literature review covered the distribution and status of lowland deer in England and Wales, damage caused by deer, management of deer, particular problem areas and priorities for future deer research.

(iii) Mink

The Department funded the Central Science Laboratory to review the ecological and economic impacts of mink in the Outer Hebrides of Scotland on behalf of Scottish Natural Heritage.

A Report to Scottish Natural Heritage. Moore, N.P., Robertson, P.A. and Aegerter, J.N. (2000) Feasibility study into the options for management of mink in the Western Isles.

Stephen Harris et al. (1995) estimate the following pre-breeding population sizes for mammals in Great Britain. There is no 10-year comparison or population data arising from research funded by the Department or available elsewhere.

	England	*Scotland*	*Wales*	*Total GB*
Fox	195,000	23,000	22,000	240,000
Brown hare	572,250	187,250	58,000	817,500
Mink	46,700	52,250	9,750	>110,000
Red deer	12,500	347,000	<50	360,000
Fallow deer	95,000	<4,000	<1,000	100,000
Roe deer	150,000	350,000	50	500,000
Sika deer	2,500	9,000	0	11,500
Muntjac deer	40,000	<50	<250	40,000
Chinese water deer	650	0	0	650

Source:

Harris, S., Morris P., Wray S. and Yalden D. 1995. A Review of British Mammals: population estimates and conservation status of British mammals other than cetaceans. J/VCC, Peterborough.

The Department has also funded the following range of studies on deer.

Desk and limited field studies to analyse the major factors influencing

regional deer populations and ranging behaviour.

Field and desk studies to develop tolerable damage levels for different habitats and species of deer.

And work is under way on the quantification of wild deer damage to agriculture crops and pastures.

The Department collects no data on numbers of foxes, deer, mink or hares killed each year, but the most recent information on numbers of foxes, deer, mink and hares killed by hunting with dogs may be found in the Burns Report.

The Department has not commissioned any studies into the predation of water voles and fish by mink, but is aware of research undertaken in this field by others.

In 1997 the then Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food commissioned the Central Science Laboratory to carry out a one-year project to assess badger damage to agriculture and forestry in England and Wales, involving a questionnaire survey backed up with damage assessments on the ground.

A badger culling field trial is being carried out as part of Defra's extensive bovine tuberculosis (TB) research programme. The trial has been designed to find out what role, if any, badgers play in the transmission of bovine TB to cattle and whether badger culling is an effective or sustainable bovine TB control mechanism.

The Department is currently funding the research project, 'Quantification of wild deer damage to agriculture, crops and pastures'. There are no data available to assess trends over the last 10 years.

The Department is not aware of any scientific studies that have examined negative physiological effects on foxes, hares or mink which escape after being hunted. However, observations on the behaviour of such animals were given to the Hunting with Dogs, Hearings on the Evidence (9–11 Sept 2002). A copy of the transcript and videos of the proceedings are available in the House of Commons Library.

In June 2001 Defra let a GB wide research contract entitled "Design and pilot a multi-species terrestrial mammal monitoring project" to the British Trust for Ornithology and the Mammal Society. The overall aim is to design and pilot a winter monitoring project involving both visual recording of mammals and the recording of their signs using a volunteer network. This is intended to form a building block for an integrated standardised mammal-monitoring system that embraces the full range of important species, and will help assess long-term trends. Certain species, such as the fox, have been targeted for monitoring, but all other mammals signs encountered should be recorded. As yet no population comparisons have been undertaken of the species being monitored. The pilot scheme concludes in November 2003.

Insurance Schemes (Livestock Farmers)

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent

discussions she has had on extending insurance schemes to livestock farmers with respect to infectious diseases. [81153]

Mr. Morley: The Defra animal disease insurance working group, which includes representatives of the insurance and farming industries, completed a series of meetings in May. Defra officials are now working on detailed proposals for a consultation exercise next year.

Local Heritage Initiatives

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much was spent by her Department and agencies on local heritage initiatives in *(a)* 2000–01, *(b)* 2001–02; and *(c)* 2002–03 to date; and if she will break down the spending by *(i)* category and (ii) region in each year. [81142]

Alun Michael: Available information on this will be included in the letter which I am about to write to the hon. Member following his parliamentary question 79728 tabled on 1 November. I will place a copy of my letter in the House of Commons Library.

Ministerial Transport

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many vehicles *(a)* she and *(b)* Ministers in her Department have access to, broken down by vehicle type; what the annual operating costs were in each of the last three financial years; how much it costs to convert a car so that it is suitable for a Government Minister; and if she will make a statement. [82023]

Alun Michael: The Secretary of State has access to one car, a Vauxhall Omega, and the Ministers in Defra have access to one car each—two Ford Mondeos and two Vauxhall Vectras.

Defra has not yet had a full financial year. However from June 2001 (when the Department was created) to the end of March 2002, spend on the five ministerial cars was in the region of £309,000. So far this financial year the Department has spent £207,000 for the five ministerial cars.

The Department has not paid to have any of the cars converted for use by a Government Minister.

Ministerial and Staff Cars

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many cars are *(a)* owned and *(b)* leased by DEFRA for Ministers and staff to use. [81015]

Alun Michael: The Department leases six cars from the Government Car service and owns 349 vehicles (including vans) for Defra Ministers and staff to use.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the 2002–03 budget is for cars and car travel by *(a)* Ministers and *(b)* staff of Defra. [81016]

Alun Michael: The standard annual cost of the five Defra Ministerial cars is in the order of £283,000 for 2002–03.

So far this year Defra has only purchased one car at a cost of approximately £10,700. There is not a yearly set budget for the purchase of Defra cars or for car travel more generally. We do not hold centralised records of car travel in the Department.

Organic Farming Schemes

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many *(a)* farmers and *(b)* farms are involved in the organic farming schemes, broken down by region. [81148]

Mr. Meacher: Information is held by beneficiary. The number of beneficiaries under the Organic Farming Scheme and the Organic Aid Scheme by region is as follows:

Region	*Total*
East Midlands	178
Eastern	160
London	1
North East	51
North West	149
South East	285
South West	873
West Midlands	256
Yorks/Humber	120
Grand total	2,073

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what funding schemes are available for organic farming; and how much is available in each scheme. [81149]

Mr. Meacher: Support for farmers converting to organic farming is currently available under the Organic Farming Scheme (OFS) which is part of the England Rural Development Programme (ERDP).

Subject to the agreement of the European Commission, as set out in the Action Plan to Develop Organic Food and Farming in England, from 2003 we intend to extend aid to farmers who have completed conversion. The budgets for the OFS from this year to the end of the life of the ERDP is as follows.

Year	*£ million*
2002	20
2003	22
2004	22
2005	23
2006	23

We also provide other support, for example through the Department's research and development programme, which includes a large component dealing with research on organic farming, and through the provision of free advice to prospective organic farmers by the Organic Conversion Information Service (OCIS). Spending on organic R&D is expected to be just over £2 million and expenditure on OCIS around £350,000 in the current financial year.

Pets

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment she has made of pets' passports and electronic tagging of pets coming into the UK. [80582]

Mr. Morley: Since the Pet Travel Scheme began on 28 February 2000 we have continually assessed its operation. When necessary, we have provided additional clarification and guidance to overcome difficulties or confusion, in particular where this resulted in animals failing to comply with the scheme's requirements. I am pleased to say that as a result of this and our continuing evaluation of our PETS publicity, the number of animals that do not pass PETS checks has fallen significantly since the scheme began.

The Advisory Group on Quarantine, whose report was the basis for the introduction of the scheme, considered carefully the necessary means of identifying pets. It decided that electronic identification was the best way forward. This system has worked well and under the proposal for a harmonised system of pet movement in the community, may, in the future, be adopted as the sole means of identification.

Quarantine

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) how many exceptions to the six month quarantine rule have been made for animals coming into the UK in each of the last 10 years; [80580]

(2) what the grounds are for exemptions of the six month quarantine rule for animals entering the UK. [80581]

Mr. Morley: Exemptions from quarantine were not granted before 1999. With the impending introduction of the Pet Travel Scheme the Government was prepared to grant exemption from quarantine in exceptional situations. To qualify for consideration for exemption we require that the applicant, or his or her child, must have a life-threatening illness, which makes it a strong possibility that they will not survive for more than six months. Evidence of the life-threatening illness is subject to independent medical scrutiny. Exceptionally, we have also granted exemption on national security grounds.

The following table shows the number of cases, in England, which have been exempted from the six months quarantine requirement in the last four years. The figures from 2000 exclude those animals which comply with the requirements of the Pet Travel Scheme.

Year	*Number of cases in which exemption from quarantine was granted*
1999	4
2000	5
2001	3
2002[1]	1

[1] To 20 November

Rural Housing

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much was spent by her Department and agencies on rural housing enablers in *(a)* 2000–01, *(b)* 2001–02, *(c)* 2002–03 to date; and if she will break down the spending by *(i)* category and (ii) region in each year. [81141]

Alun Michael: Total spend on the Rural Housing Enabler Programme by the Countryside Agency on behalf of DEFRA in 2000–01 to 2002–03 by region is as shown in the table. A breakdown of the type of activity undertaken is not available centrally.

£000

Region	*2000–01*[1]	*2001–02*	*2002–03*[2]
North West	15,785	31,920	42,340
East Midlands	31,571	78,279	72,126
East of England	47,357	65,154	92,127
North East	15,785	16,639	23,167
South West	15,786	49,060	208,794
South East	31,572	23,500	106,412
West Midlands	15,786	51,495	20,976
Yorkshire and the Humber	47,358	46,481	68,640
Total	221,000	362,528	634,582

[1] Figures are based on number of projects in each region and mean cost. Total actual spend for 2000–01 was £221,000

[2] Forecast

Rural Regeneration

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on methods used by her Department to measure rural regeneration in the United Kingdom. [81903]

Alun Michael: The Government will be breaking new ground by measuring rural regeneration through its impact on rural productivity as part of the new rural economy Public Service Agreement target which commits Defra in conjunction with other Government Departments to "reducing the gap in productivity between the less well performing quartile of rural areas and the English median by 2006." As GDP data—typically used in measuring productivity—is not available at small area level my officials have developed a proxy productivity measure of the aggregate earnings of taxpayers of working age divided by the number of people of working age. A set of districts, facing problems of lower productivity, will be used to track change. This will be supplemented by other related indicators, such as business start-ups.

More details will become available shortly when the technical notes are published on Defra's website www.defra.gov.uk.

Sewage Sludge

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps she takes to ensure each batch of sewage sludge spread on agricultural land is not unacceptably contaminated by heavy metals. [80842]

Mr. Morley: The Sludge (Use in Agriculture) Regulations 1989 (SI 1263), as amended in 1990 (SI 880), impose controls on the application of sewage sludge to agricultural land, including statutory limits on the amount of heavy metals that can be added to the soil and on the concentration of heavy metals in the soil after

application. The regulations, which are enforced by the Environment Agency, require regular testing and analysis of sewage sludge before it is applied.

Slurry Contamination

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the average fine was for slurry contamination in 2001–02, broken down by region. [81147]

Mr. Morley: The table shows, by Environment Agency region, the average fine for offences prosecuted in 2001–02 under Section 85 of the Water Resources Act 1991 involving all types of agricultural pollution including slurry pollution.

Enhancement to the agency's national enforcement database planned for the first quarter of 2003 will allow provision of information on specific pollutants such as slurry, but information is not currently held at this level of detail.

Region	*Average fine (£)*
Anglian	3,000
Midlands	4,275
North-east	1,500
North-west	3,000
South-west	3,000
Southern	1,750
Thames	5,750
Welsh	2,500

Soil Strategy (England)

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs when she expects to publish the final Soil Strategy for England. [81832]

Mr. Meacher: I expect to publish a Soil Action Plan for England before the end of the year. The action plan will include specific commitments to move forward measures proposed in the draft strategy.

Veterinary Practices

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to amend the disciplinary process for veterinary surgeons in the UK; and if she will make a statement. [81154]

Mr. Morley: Under the Veterinary Surgeons Act 1966 (VSA) responsibility for disciplining members of the veterinary profession in the UK falls to the Council of the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons. There are no plans to change this procedure at this time.

Water Leaks

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much water was estimated to be lost from company supply pipes, broken down by each water supplier, in *(a)* 2001, *(b)* 1997 and *(c)* 1992. [80874]

Mr. Morley: Water company leakage data is published annually by the Director General of Water Services in the 'Security of supply, leakage and the efficient use of water' reports. The reported total leakage figures, which include companies' distribution losses and customers' supply pipe losses, for 1992–93, 1997–98 and 2001–02 (in Megalitres/day) were as follows:

	1992–93	*1997–98*	*2001–02*
Water and Sewerage Companies			
Anglian	273	240	224
Dwr Cymru (Welsh)	383	329	245
North West	945	579	452
Northumbrian	276	184	161
Severn Trent	570	399	340
South West	158	101	83
Southern	161	99	92
Thames	803	906	865
Wessex	137	110	79
Yorkshire	505	377	297
Water only companies			
Bournemouth and West Hants	27	26	22
Bristol	64	59	55
Cambridge	16	14	14
Dee Valley	19	12	11
Essex and Suffolk	96	82	73
Folkestone	14	9	8
Mid Kent	40	36	29
Portsmouth	33	32	30
South East	90	108	75
South Staffs	87	82	71
Sutton and East Surrey	35	26	24
Tendring Hundred	6	6	5
Three Valleys	205	173	157
Industry total	4,845	3,989	3,414

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Bookmakers

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport for what reason bookmakers are required by the Horse Race Betting Levy Board to have their accounts signed by a registered auditor, where their turnover is between £250,000 and £1 million. [80137]

Mr. Caborn: The Levy Board requires bookmakers to have their annual declaration for 2001/02 signed by a registered auditor where their horserace betting turnover exceeds £275,000. The Board relies upon the auditor's certification as confirmation of its accuracy. The turnover figure of £275,000 equates to approximately £5,300 per week, above which a betting shop business is deemed to be sufficiently substantial to require audit confirmation.

Mr. Peter Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many bookmakers registered with the Horse Race Betting Levy Board have recorded turnovers of *(a)* less than £250,000, *(b)* £250,000 to £1 million and *(c)* above £1 million in 2001–02. [80138]

Mr. Caborn: The number of bookmakers registered with the Horserace Betting Levy Board falling into the three specified turnover bands in 2001–02 was as follows:

Turnover band	*Number of bookmakers*
(a) Less than £250,000	338
(b) £250,000 to £1,000,000	826
(c) Above £1,000,000	239

BBC

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what estimate she has made of the proportion of the BBC's programming that is public service broadcasting. [80431]

Dr. Howells: It is the responsibility of the BBC governors to ensure that the Corporation's public service remit, as set out in the charter and agreement, is delivered across the full range of BBC public services.

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport whether it is her policy that the licence fee should remain the main source of finance of the BBC. [80435]

Dr. Howells: The Government's policy is that the television licence fee will remain the main source of BBC funding at least until the expiry of the BBC's current Royal Charter at the end of 2006. Future funding arrangements will need to be considered as part of the Charter review process, which will commence in 2004.

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, when she intends to publish the review of BBC News 24 conducted by Mr. Richard Lambert; and if she will make a statement. [81660]

Dr. Howells: *[holding answer Tuesday 19 November 2002]:* I am currently considering my response to Mr. Lambert's review of BBC News 24 and will publish the review as soon as possible.

Congestion Charging

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many car parking spaces are available to *(a)* employees of her Department and *(b)* visitors to her Department within the proposed central London road user charging zone. [81868]

Dr. Howells: *[holding answer Tuesday 19 November 2002]:* The Department for Culture, Media and Sport has four offices within the central London charging zone with accommodation for over four hundred staff. There are a total of 13 parking spaces available to the Department, five of which are reserved for official cars and a further space reserved for a member of staff with a disability. The remaining seven spaces are available for booking by staff on a day to day basis where a need can be shown and for visitors and contractor's vehicles. One of those spaces is being converted for cycle storage by the installation of fixed cycle racks; another of the seven spaces is regularly used for the parking of three motorcycle and scooters.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the policy is of her Department in relation to the reimbursement of Central London road user charges incurred by its employees. [81848]

Dr. Howells: *[holding answer Tuesday 19 November 2002]:* It is general departmental travel planning policy that staff should not be encouraged to use cars to commute to and from work. Also, the cost of daily travel between home and the permanent place of work lies with staff, not the employer. However, staff on official business who are required to drive their own vehicles, or hire vehicles, within the charging zone will be reimbursed.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the estimated cost is to her Department of the central London road user charging scheme for *(a)* 17th February 2003 to 31st March 2003, and *(b)* 1 April 2003 to 31 March 2004. [81887]

Dr. Howells: *[holding answer 19 November 2002]:* Any additional costs to my Department as a result of the congestion-charging scheme will be just one element within wider costs, which have to be met from budgets for official travelling and other costs.

Employees (Over-50s)

Mr. MacDougall: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many people employed in her Department are aged over 50. [81687]

Dr. Howells: There are 72 staff aged over 50 currently employed within DCMS.

Greek Culture Minister

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will make a statement on her recent discussions with the Greek Culture Minister, Evangelos Venizelos. [80492]

Tessa Jowell: Mr. Venizelos outlined his plans for Greece's Presidency of the European Union in the first half of 2003 and explained the preparations that are being made for the Athens Olympics in 2004.

Mr. Venizelos also mentioned a proposal put forward by the Greek Prime Minister, Mr. Simitos, to the Prime Minister about reuniting the Parthenon sculptures in the planned new Acropolis Museum on a long-term loan basis with reciprocal loans to the British Museum. I explained that it is a matter for the Trustees of the British Museum to decide on any loans or reciprocal exchanges.

IT Security

Brian White: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what steps she has taken to review the security of the Department's IT system; and how many digital attacks there were on the Department's system in *(a)* October and *(b)* 2002. [80766]

Dr. Howells: My Department takes IT security very seriously. Along with our work to ensure BS799 compliance we have carried out a number of reviews of IT security using independent external reviewers. We continue to keep this area under review.

We have no evidence of any digital attacks on the Department's systems to date during 2002.

Kensington Palace

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what rent is received from Prince Michael of Kent in respect of his apartment at Kensington Palace; and what the estimated open market rent of this property would be. [80877]

Dr. Howells: Prince and Princess Michael of Kent pay £69.00 per week for their apartment at Kensington Palace. The open market rent for this property is not relevant because it is situated within the security cordon and cannot be offered on the open market.

Media Ownership

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what estimate she has made of how much of the media is owned by *(a)* Continental European and *(b)* USA investors. [80727]

Dr. Howells *[holding answer 18 November 2002]:* The Government have not made an estimate of how much of the UK media is owned by Continental European or USA investors.

Regional Museums

Hugh Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport when her Department intends to start providing government funding for regional museums; if she will list the museums in Yorkshire and the Humber which will receive support in the first year of the new scheme; and how much funding each of those museums will receive. [81482]

Dr. Howells: We will be providing £70 million for regional museums from this year until 2005–06. Extra funding will also be made available to the national museums to enable them to work in partnership with regional museums. Additionally there will be funds from the Department for Education and Skills to support museums' education.

Funding will be allocated by Resource to 'regional hubs' led by major regional museums. Resource will announce the configuration of the Hubs before the end of this year and the funding allocation in the new year.

Sports Budget

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list lottery funded sports projects where there have been *(a)* extensions to the timeframe and *(b)* alterations to conditions of funding. [80962]

Mr. Caborn: The standard terms and conditions of awards made by Sport England from the lottery sports fund do not include any requirements in respect of the timing of the completion of the project. Sport England does not collect statistical information on cases which involve variations to case-specific funding conditions. However, within the parameters of public accountability and their financial directions, Sport England operates flexibly in partnership with the applicant to enable the project to fulfil its objectives and achieve the outcomes upon which the award decision was based. It works with the applicant to help them to build the best scheme possible in a realistic timeframe.

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what *(a)* UK Sport's and *(b)* Sport England's Exchequer budget for sport and related projects was in each of the last three years; how much budgetary underspend there was; and what funding was carried over under end-year flexibility arrangements. [80964]

Mr. Caborn: Sport England's Grant-in-Aid from the Department for the last three years was as follows:

Year	*£ million*
1999–2000	37.873
2000–01	37.973
2001–02	43.162

Sport England carried over £350,000 from 1999–2000 to 2000–01 under the end-year flexibility arrangements.

UK Sport's Grant-in-Aid for the last three years was:

Year	*£ million*
1999–2000	12.60
2000–01	12.75
2001–02	17.60

UK Sport carried over £827,000 from 2001–02 to 2002–03 under the end-year flexibility arrangements.

TV Licence Evasion

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) how many *(a)* prosecutions and *(b)* convictions for TV licence evasion there were in each of the last 20 years. [80441]

(2) what proportion of those prosecuted for TV licence evasion were on income-related benefits in each of the last 20 years. [80443]

Dr. Howells: The available information relates to all offences under the Wireless Telegraphy Acts of 1949 and 1967, though the great majority of these involve licence fee evasion. Information is not recorded on the circumstances of individual offenders. The numbers of defendants proceeded against in the magistrates' courts and found guilty in all courts in England and Wales, for the years 1981 to 2000, were:

Year	*Proceeded against*	*Found guilty*
1981	51.754	49,645
1982	64,140	61,882
1983	69,908	67,496
1984	80,578	77,211
1985	84,806	80,632
1986	138,890	128,646
1987	134,472	120,374
1988	142,306	124,283
1989	141,335	123,672
1990	147,490	126,416
1991	163,964	138,701
1992	195,921	170,285
1993	194,868	168,706
1994	188,711	162,859
1995[1]	130,956	113,795
1996	188,108	164,848
1997	92,728	76,984
1998	96,616	76,605
1999	68,778	55,813
2000[2]	121,137	105,725

[1] In 1995 there was a shortfall in the data for offenders found guilty for Wireless Telegraphic Act offences (57,400).

[2] Staffordshire Police Force were only able to supply a sample of data for magistrates' courts proceedings covering one full week in each quarter for 2000. Estimates based on this sample are included in the figures, as they are considered sufficiently robust at this high level of analysis.

PRIVY COUNCIL OFFICE

Bicycle Allowance

Norman Baker: To ask the President of the Council how many Members claimed a bicycle allowance in the last year for which figures are available. [80878]

Mr. Robin Cook: Four Members claimed a bicycle allowance in the financial year 2001–02.

TRANSPORT

Accidents

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many deaths arose from *(a)* road and *(b)* rail accidents in each year since 1972 to date, expressed *(i)* in absolute terms and (ii) per person mile travelled. [81577]

Mr. Jamieson: The table provides the number of deaths that arose in Great Britain from road and rail accidents expressed in absolute terms and per billion passenger miles travelled.

Deaths in road accidents relate to those occurring on the public highway (including footways) in which at least one road vehicle or a vehicle in collision with a pedestrian is involved.

Rail deaths include passenger deaths in train accidents and accidents occurring through the movement of railway vehicles. Staff deaths, trespassers, suicides and deaths occurring at railway premises that do not involve the movement of trains (for example, falling down steps) are excluded.

Deaths in road and rail accidents

	Roads		*Rail*	
	Deaths	*Deaths per billion passenger miles travelled*	*Deaths*	*Deaths per billion passenger miles travelled*
1972	7,763	31.6	27	1.3
1973	7,406	28.8	42	1.9
1974	6,883	27.5	25	1.1
1975	6,366	25.5	69	3.1
1976	6,570	25.3	29	1.4
1977	6,614	25.0	27	1.3
1978	6,831	25.2	45	2.1
1979	6,352	23.6	50	2.3
1980	6,010	21.4	25	1.1
1981	5,846	20.5	35	1.7
1982	5,934	20.3	18	0.9
1983	5,445	18.5	27	1.3
1984	5,599	18.2	39	1.8
1985	5,165	16.5	31	1.4
1986	5,382	16.5	32	1.4
1987	5,125	14.7	39	1.6
1988	5,052	13.7	68	2.7
1989	5,373	13.5	31	1.3
1990	5,217	13.0	35	1.4
1991[1]	4,568	11.5	30	1.2
1992	4,229	10.7	16	0.7
1993	3,814	9.6	14	0.6
1994	3,650	9.1	15	0.7
1995	3,621	9.0	8	0.3
1996	3,598	8.8	14	0.6
1997	3,599	8.7	22	0.8
1998	3,421	8.2	17	0.6
1999	3,423	8.2	43	1.5
2000[2]	3,409	8.2	17	0.6
2001	3,450	8.2	[3]7	[3]0.2

[1] From 1991, rail figures changed to financial years (there were eight deaths between January and March 1991).
[2] Figures for road passenger miles travelled in 2000 and 2001 have been produced on a new basis. The effect on the estimated rate of deaths per billion passenger miles travelled is negligible.
[3] Provisional figures.

Air Traffic (Demand)

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what research has been conducted by his Department since 1997 or is planned on increases in air passenger numbers for the United Kingdom which *(a)* have taken place, and *(b)* are projected. [81409]

Mr. Jamieson: Since 1997, the results of research on increases in air passenger numbers have been published in "Air Traffic Forecasts for the United Kingdom 2000, published by the Department in May 2000 and in the national airport consultation documents, published in July this year.

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what research has been conducted by his Department or is planned on the causal processes responsible for *(a)* past and *(b)* potential future increases in air passenger numbers and air freight; and if he will place copies of related documentation in the Library; [81416]

(2) what *(a)* discussions his Department has had or plans to have and *(b)* representations have been received by his Department with regard to the causal processes and mechanisms responsible for *(i)* past and (ii) potential future increases in air passenger numbers and air freight. [81417]

Mr. Jamieson: The Department's air traffic forecasts "Air Traffic Forecasts for the United Kingdom 2000", published in May 2000 considers the key economic drivers behind past and projected future increases in air passenger numbers. In addition the factors underlying growth of air passenger are freight traffic are addressed in the consultation documents on regional air services and airports published in July 2002. Supporting material on freight can be found in documents 39, 40 and 67 referred to in Annex C of the South East Consultation document. The Department has had no specific discussions or representations on this question, although it may be covered in the responses to the national airport consultation which closes on 30 November.

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what *(a)* discussions his Department has had or plans to have and *(b)* representations have been received by his Department with regard to the past and potential effect on passenger numbers of the inter-relationship between consumer-driven and producer-driven aviation demand; [81423]

(2) what research has been conducted by his Department or is planned on the past and potential effect on passenger numbers of the inter-relationship between consumer-driven and producer-driven aviation demand. [81422]

Mr. Jamieson: The Department's air traffic forecasts, published in 2000 considers the factors underlying growth of business and leisure air traffic. No research on the inter-relationship between consumer-driven and producer-driven demand has been conducted or is

planned, but insofar as producer-driven demand leads to higher GDP than would otherwise be the case, the resulting higher incomes will tend to lead to more leisure travel. The Department has had no specific discussions or representations on this issue, although this subject may be covered in the responses to the national airport consultation which closes on 30 November.

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what research has been conducted by his Department, or is planned, on the role of advertising and promotion in *(a)* the past and potential future growth of air traffic and *(b)* past and potential future modal shift between air transport and other modes. [81426]

Mr. Jamieson: No research has been conducted or is planned on the role of advertising or promotion in either the growth of air traffic or modal shift between aviation and other forms of transport.

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what *(a)* discussions his Department has had or plans to have and *(b)* representations have been received by his Department with regard to the role of advertising and promotion in *(i)* the past and potential future growth of air traffic and (ii) past and potential future modal shift between air transport and other modes. [81427]

Mr. Jamieson: The Department has undertaken no work and have had no specific discussions or representations on the role of advertising and promotion in relation to these questions, although this subject may be covered in the responses to the national airport consultation which closes on 30 November.

Aircraft Emissions

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what research has been conducted by his Department or is planned on the role of emissions trading within the aviation industry; [81428]

(2) what *(a)* discussions his Department has had or plans to have and *(b)* representations have been received by his Department with regard to the role of emissions trading within the aviation industry. [81429]

Mr. Jamieson: Last year the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) endorsed the development of an emissions trading system for international aviation that would involve trading with other sectors. It requested its Council as a matter of priority to develop guidelines for the structural and legal basis of such a system consistent with the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) process. My Department has since discussed this at various meetings under ICAO's auspices. It has also discussed it with several UK stakeholders as part of meetings on wider issues. Representations made so far have all been broadly supportive. Further discussions of both kinds are expected. The ICAO work is still at a relatively early stage. The Department itself has not conducted research on this subject, nor is it planning to do so.

Aircraft Noise

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what *(a)* discussions his Department has had or plans to have and *(b)* representations have been received by his Department with regard to the past and potential future impact of *(i)* changes in noise levels permitted from individual aircraft and (ii) changes in the size of aircraft upon (A) past increases and future total passenger and freight numbers and (B) past and future (1) economic, (2) environmental and (3) social impacts. [81418]

Mr. Jamieson: The full information requested is not readily available and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. The assessment of options for the future of UK aviation contains information on economic, social and environmental impacts. This information is set out in the national airport consultation documents published in July 2002. A complete set of those documents and supporting material is available in the Libraries of the House.

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what *(a)* discussions his Department has had or plans to have and *(b)* representations have been received by his Department with regard to the past and potential future impact of *(i)* compensation and (ii) noise insulation schemes being made available to householders near airports upon (A) past increases and future total passenger and freight numbers and (B) past and future (1) economic, (2) environmental and (3) social impacts; [81421]

(2) what assessment and research has been made by his Department, or is planned, of the past and potential future impact of *(a)* compensation and *(b)* noise insulation schemes being made available to householders near airports upon *(i)* past increases and future total passenger and freight numbers and (ii) past and future (A) economic, (B) environmental and (C) social impacts; [81420]

(3) what *(a)* compensation and *(b)* noise insulation schemes are available to householders near airports; what the total level of compensation and financial support has been in each year since 1992; what plans there are to change the nature of the schemes. [81419]

Mr. Jamieson: The Government consider that providing for the effective management of the impacts of airport development will be a key element of a sustainable airports policy. Indeed, this is identified as one of three central issues in the current consultation document, "The Future Development of Air Transport in the United Kingdom". The document includes proposals for a range of measures aimed at controlling or mitigating local impacts—including the effects of noise from aircraft—and, where that is not possible, providing adequate compensation. The Government are seeking consultees' views on those proposals and inviting other ideas for dealing with this issue.

We will study carefully what consultees say in their responses when we come to take decisions for the White Paper next year.

The SERAS study considered the economic costs of aircraft noise, based on observed impacts on property prices. The results are presented in paragraph 14.31 of the consultation document, which is available in the Libraries of the House along with all the SERAS technical reports.

In terms of the current position on compensation and noise insulation schemes, I refer the hon. Member to the answers given to my hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell) on 15 October 2002, *Official Report*, columns 721–22W, and to my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne, Central (Mr. Cousins) on 25 April 2002, *Official Report*, columns 388–89W. Information on costs paid under noise insulation schemes is not kept centrally.

The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has published a series of five booklets entitled, "Compulsory Purchase and Compensation", which are available free from Free Literature, PO Box 236, Wetherby, LS23 7NB (tel. 0870 1226 236)—product code 01PD0458/1-5.

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what UK legislation covers the maximum level of noise from aircraft *(a)* registered, *(b)* landing and *(c)* flying through airspace in the United Kingdom; and what plans there are to amend the legislation. [81424]

Mr. Jamieson: Noise certification requirements are prescribed by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO), under Annex 16 Volume I of the Chicago Convention. The Aeroplane Noise Regulations 1999 (SI 1999 No. 1452) and the Air Navigation (Environmental Standards) Order 2002 (SI 2002 No. 798) transpose these requirements, certain European aircraft noise Directives, and noise certification requirements for microlight aircraft developed by the Civil Aviation Authority, into UK legislation. Taken together, this legislation requires noise certification of most types of civil aircraft taking off or landing in the UK. Civil aircraft overflying UK airspace without taking off or landing in the UK are unlikely to cause significant noise nuisance.

EU Regulation 1592/2002 establishes with effect from 28 September 2003 the new European Aviation Safety Agency (EASA). Article 15*(l)(h)* of that Regulation will confer on EASA a duty to issue environmental certificates, which currently is the responsibility of the Civil Aviation Authority for UK-registered aircraft. Future measures, such as those required to implement the ICAO Chapter 4 requirements for new types of jet aircraft from 2006, will be taken in this context. Detailed arrangements will be determined in due course.

In addition, departure noise limits are specified by Notice under s78 of the 1982 Act for Heathrow, Gatwick and Stansted airports. Some other UK airports apply their own operational noise limits.

Airline Passengers (Shared Information)

Mr. Spring: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the Government's policy is on sharing information on airline passengers with the United States of America; what the Government's position is on the European Commission's policy on sharing information on airline passengers with the United States of America; and if he will make a statement. [81112]

Mr. Jamieson: The UK Government fully support the United States' Governments efforts to combat terrorism and asserts that the drive to improve global security should be realistic, achievable and practical. The UK Government notes the European Commission's view that some of the US Government's requirements for airlines to provide the US authorities with information about incoming passengers raises issues of compatibility with EC legislation. The UK Government support the Commission's request for urgent discussions with the US authorities.

Airport Charges

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment has been made by his Department or is planned of the regime of landing charges at airports in the United Kingdom. [81402]

Mr. Jamieson: The Future of Aviation consultation document published in December 2000 stated in paragraph 221 the Department

> "will work with the CAA to develop modifications to the current regulatory regime to improve incentives for timely investment and improved quality of service".

One proposal identified in paragraph 223 was to permit the CAA rather than the Competition Commission to undertake an investigation before they set the price cap, with the Competition Commission becoming an appeal body. This would bring the regime for economic regulation of airports into line with the system that exists for other regulated utilities. A further proposal identified was to give the CAA concurrent powers with the Director General of Fair Trading to enforce general competition law in the airports sector.

CO_2 Emissions

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the average CO_2 emission per air passenger has been in each year since 1990. [80845]

Mr. Jamieson: Information is not available in the form requested. Table 2.8 on page 40 of "Transport Statistics Great Britain 2002" shows that the total contribution by civil aviation to CO_2 emissions in the United Kingdom remained steady throughout each year from 1990 to 2000 and comprised 1 per cent. in 2000, the latest year for which data are available.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimate he has made of the average carbon dioxide emissions per person per journey from London to Newcastle by *(a)* air, *(b)* rail, *(c)* lorry and *(d)* car. [81579]

Mr. Jamieson: The estimates are as follows:

	kg
(a) Air (average per passenger)	49
(b) Rail (average per passenger)	16
(c) Lorry (average per lorry)	
Articulated diesel	403
Rigid diesel	461
(d) Car (average petrol):	
Per car	89
Average per passenger	56
(e) Car (average diesel):	
Per car	54
Per passenger	34

Estimates are based on a journey distance of 270 miles. In the case of air travel and rail travel, they make no allowance for travel to the airport or railway station. In the case of lorries, it is assumed that fuel consumption for an articulated lorry is 0.35 litres per km, and for a rigid lorry, 0.40 litres per km. Emissions per passenger for travel by car will depend on the size of the vehicle, and the number of passengers. Estimates above are based on an average car and average car occupancy over all journeys of 1.59 passengers per car derived from National Travel Survey in the period 1999–2001.

Cyclists

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the number of accidents caused by cyclists bumping into pedestrians on *(a)* pavements and *(b)* public carriageways in the last year for which figures are available. [80396]

Mr. Jamieson: In Great Britain in 2001, there were 64 accidents reported to the police between cyclists and pedestrians on pavements, and 148 such accidents on public carriageways. These figures include only those accidents in which a pedestrian was injured.

International Hub Airports

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what research *(a)* has been conducted and *(b)* has been assessed by his Department, or is planned on the *(i)* economic, (ii) social and (iii) environmental costs and benefits which (A) have been obtained and (B) could potentially be obtained from international hub airports in the United Kingdom; [81412]

(2) what research *(a)* has been conducted and *(b)* has been assessed by his Department, or is planned on the *(i)* economic, (ii) social and (iii) environmental costs and benefits which (A) have been obtained and (B) could potentially be obtained from changes in the number of international passengers passing through International hub airports in the United Kingdom. [81413]

Mr. Jamieson: These issues have been covered extensively in the Government's recent airport studies. In particular, the SERAS study included a report by the consultants Booz Alien on issues relating to hub airports. The economic, social and environmental costs and benefits of various airport options, including some which could be international hub airports, are set out in the consultation document "The Future Development of Air Transport in the United Kingdom". The economic benefits set out there do not include any benefits to international transfer passengers (i.e. those who are not travelling to or from the UK), but do take account of the benefits to travellers to and from the UK from air services which are made viable by international transfer passengers. The role of hub airports in a long-term sustainable airports policy is one of the central issues on which the Government are seeking views through the consultation. Copies of the consultation document and the SERAS technical reports have been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Landing Charges

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what *(a)* discussions his Department has had or plans to have and *(b)* representations have been received by his Department with regards the potential effect of changes in landing charges at airports in the United Kingdom upon passenger numbers at each airport; [81414]

(2) what research has been conducted by his Department, or is planned, on the potential effect of changes in landing charges at airports in the United Kingdom upon passenger numbers at each airport. [81403]

Mr. Jamieson: The impact of a 50 per cent. increase in airport landing charges was considered as a sensitivity test in the Department's most recently published air traffic forecasts (Air Traffic Forecasts for the United Kingdom 2000, published in May 2000). This showed that such an increase would have the effect of reducing forecast air passengers at UK airports by 7.5 per cent. in 2020, from 401 to 371 million.

London Traffic

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the average speed is of traffic in central London; what it was *(a)* five and *(b)* 10 years ago. [81031]

Mr. Spellar: Surveys of average traffic speeds were carried out in London until the year 2000 by the Department for Transport. Figures are not held specifically for all the years requested. Central, Inner and Outer London were surveyed in turn, and results for Central London were published for 1990, 1994, 1997 and 2000. Speeds in Central London for these years are shown in the following table:

Central London average traffic speeds (mph)

Year	*am peak (07:45 to 09: 15)*	*off-peak (10:00 to 12:00) (14:00 to 16:00)*	*pm peak (16:45 to 18:15)*
1990	10.3	10.6	10.3
1994	10.9	10.9	10.8
1997	10.0	10.0	10.2
2000	9.9	9.0	9.6

Since 3 July 2000, Transport for London have taken over responsibility for running the London speed surveys.

Modal Shifts

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what *(a)* discussions his Department has had or plans to have and *(b)* representations have been received by his Department with regard the causal processes and mechanisms responsible for *(i)* past and (ii) potential future modal shifts between air transport and other modes of transport for (A) passengers and (B) freight transport, distinguishing between (1) internal and (2) international flights. [81399]

Mr. Jamieson: This subject is likely to be covered in the responses to the national airport consultation which closes on 30 November. In preparation for the national consultation, the Regional Air Services Coordination Study [RASCO], available on www.airconsult.gov.uk describes work done by the Strategic Rail Authority on

the potential for rail/air substitution so far as domestic passengers are concerned. "The Future Development of Air Transport in the United Kingdom: South East ", available on the same website, refers [pages 155–56] to Tier 2 documents Nos. 39, 40, and 67 which deal with air freight. The service quality improvements resulting from use of the Channel Tunnel Rail Link are expected to result in some transfer of international air passengers to Eurostar.

Multi-modal Study

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the role of demand management revenues in the funding process for new highway schemes proposed under the multi-modal study process. [81594]

Mr. Jamieson: We are considering the recommendations from a number of multi-modal studies and will make a statement in due course.

Open Skies

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on progress towards an open skies agreement with the United States; what discussions have taken place or are planned; what representations have been received. [81407]

Mr. Jamieson: Having earlier rejected UK proposals for the full liberalisation of the UK-US aviation market, in September the US Government rejected UK proposals for a partial liberalisation of the market. Although the US Government has not put forward any counter-proposals, they have indicated that for a limited deal to be acceptable it would have to include unrestricted fifth freedom rights for all-cargo services. They would not, however, be ready to open up the US domestic market to competition.

The Secretary of State has asked for further work to be carried out on the possible impact on such a deal on UK airlines and UK business. We are involving a number of interests in this work.

Quiet Lane Projects

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list the Quiet Lane projects across England that are fully operational. [81745]

Alun Michael: I have been asked to reply.

There are two national demonstration 'Quiet Lanes' projects, one in the North Norfolk coast Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty and one in the West Kent Greensand Ridge. They have been developed by the Countryside Agency, working on behalf of Defra, in partnership with Norfolk and Kent county councils, Department for Transport and the Transport Research Laboratory. There are also eight further areas which are developing 'Quiet Lanes' projects.

Radioactive Material

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many movements there were in each year since 1985 of *(a)* high-level and *(b)* intermediate-level radioactive material, *(i)* by train, (ii) by road, (iii) by air and (iv) by ship. [80859]

Mr. Jamieson: This Department does not hold statistical information of the type requested.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether it is permissible to transport *(a)* high-level and *(b)* intermediate-level radioactive material, *(i)* on passenger ferries and (ii) through the channel tunnel. [80860]

Mr. Jamieson: The transport of radioactive material on passenger ferries is permissible subject to the safety requirements and restrictions of the International Maritime Dangerous Goods Code, Amendment 30–00, as required by The Merchant Shipping (Dangerous Goods and Marine Pollutants) Regulations 1997 SI 1997 No 2367); Merchant Shipping Notice No. M 1755(M), "The Carriage of Dangerous Goods and Marine Pollutants in Packaged Form—Amendment 30–00 to the International Maritime Dangerous Goods (MDG) Code" and, where applicable, The Merchant Shipping (Carriage of Packaged Irradiated Nuclear Fuel etc.) (INF Code) Regulations 2000 (SI 2000 No 3216).

Transport through the channel tunnel of radioactive material in/as Excepted Packages, solid non-combustible Low Specific Activity Material, solid non-combustible Surface Contaminated Objects and Type A Packages complying with RID[1]/ADR[2] is permissible only as authorised through Eurotunnel Freight by prior agreement between the manufacturer/producer and Eurotunnel. Radioactive material other than that in/as Excepted Packages is further restricted to new manufactured goods in their original packaging. In all cases material requiring two or more danger labels is not authorised.

[1] Convention concerning International Carriage by Rail (COTIF) Appendix B. Uniform Rules concerning the Contract for International Carriage of Goods by Rail (CIM) ANNEX I Regulations concerning the International Carriage of Dangerous Goods by Rail (RID) 2001 Edition.

[2] European Agreement concerning the International Carriage of Dangerous Goods by Road (ADR) 2001 Edition.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many accidents there have been, in each year since 1972, involving the transportation of radioactive material *(a)* by air, *(b)* by road, *(c)* by rail and *(d)* by ship. [80862]

Mr. Jamieson: Since 1989 information on accidents and incidents involving the transport of radioactive material in the UK has been published annually. The reports covering events in each year have been placed in the Libraries of the House.

Data on events prior to 1989 can be found in the following reports:

1. Review of the Radiological Consequences Resulting from Accidents and Incidents Involving the Transport of Radioactive Materials in the UK from 1964 to 1988 (NRPB-M206)
2. Accidents and Incidents involving the Transport of Radioactive Materials in the UK, from 1958 to 1994, and their Radiological Consequences. (NRPB-R282)

These two reports are also available in the Libraries of the House.

Rail Electrification

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what his policy is on the electrification of rail lines operated by diesel-powered rolling stock. [81593]

Mr. Jamieson: Our objectives are to deliver a reliable and safe railway focused on customer needs. The SRA will evaluate electrification projects against these objectives, giving due consideration to value for money and affordability.

Railway Stations

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many railway stations *(a)* opened and *(b)* closed in each year since 1972. [81587]

Mr. Jamieson: The information is given in the table.

Year	*Stations opened*	*Stations closed*
1972	4	16
1973	5	9
1974	1	0
1975	3	3
1976	8	1
1977	5	8
1978	12	0
1979	9	0
1980	4	0
1981	5	6
1982	10	0
1983	8	16
1984	14	1
1985	18	7
1986	27	7
1987	25	1
1988	25	2
1989	16	9
1990	21	2
1991	6	3
1992	15	3
1993	15	2
1994	17	3
1995	10	5
1996	4	1
1997	4	1
1998	1	2
1999	1	0
2000	1	0
2001	0	0
2002	1	2

Road Traffic

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the percentage change has been in road traffic levels in each year from 1997, taking 1997 as a base figure of 100; and what the projected levels are for each year to 2012. [81588]

Mr. Jamieson: Total road traffic in Great Britain is currently estimated to have grown by 4.9 per cent. over four years since 1997:

Year	
1997	1000.0
1998	101.5
1999	103.2
2000	103.5
2001	104.9

The Department's publication "National Road Traffic Forecasts (Great Britain) 1997" projects Low and High rates of traffic growth, to take account of uncertainty in future growth of the economy and future fuel price. These figures do not take account of the 10 year plan. Applying these forecast rates to the 2001 index gives projected road traffic levels:

Year	
2002	106.3 to 107.0
2003	107.8 to 109.1
2004	109.2 to 111.3
2005	110.7 to 113.5
2006	112.2 to 115.8
2007	113.4 to 117.9
2008	114.8 to 120.0
2009	116.2 to 122.2
2010	117.6 to 124.5
2011	119.0 to 126.7
2012	120.3 to 129.0

South Central Franchise

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport for what reason the franchise for South Central has been reduced to seven years. [81578]

Mr. Jamieson: It proved impossible to agree terms for a 20-year franchise which both the SRA and Go Via found affordable and acceptable. The altered circumstances of Railtrack since the Hatfield derailment had a bearing. The uncertain impact of other rail projects, notably Thameslink 2000, was also relevant.

Transport Costs

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what information he collates on the average cost of travelling one kilometre by rail in each of the OECD countries. [81580]

Mr. Jamieson: A reliable comparison of fares requires comprehensive data on the range of different fares and discounts available, and the degree to which they are used. We do not collate such data, and are not aware that any other body does so either.

Travel Costs

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what has been the real change in costs of travelling by *(a)* car, *(b)* train and *(c)* bus in each year since 1972, taking 1972 as a base figure of 100; and discounting inflation. [81589]

Mr. Jamieson: Information in the form requested is available only since 1974. The figures in the table have therefore been expressed on a base of 1974 = 100.

Real Changes in the cost of transport: 1974 = 100

	All motoring[1]	*Rail*	*Bus*
1974	100	100	100
1975	104.4	109.2	104.9
1976	101.2	124.3	114.9
1977	99.9	125.0	114.1
1978	99.7	132.0	119.4
1979	104.0	128.8	118.4
1980	103.8	135.6	127.0

Real Changes in the cost of transport: 1974 = 100

	All motoring[1]	*Rail*	*Bus*
1981	103.9	138.6	125.6
1982	101.0	146.5	133.3
1983	103.2	148.5	134.7
1984	100.7	142.0	131.1
1985	99.4	142.4	128.9
1986	94.7	147.0	135.2
1987	96.3	148.4	137.4
1988	95.9	151.3	140.1
1989	93.9	153.2	140.2
1990	91.0	152.2	135.1
1991	92.3	158.8	145.5
1992	95.0	164.2	150.2
1993	97.6	173.0	154.3
1994	98.5	176.3	154.6
1995	97.0	178.1	155.0
1996	97.5	180.3	156.9
1997	99.6	178.9	157.6
1998	99.3	180.1	157.3
1999	100.2	183.8	160.6
2000	101.0	181.6	162.3
2001	98.7	185.3	166.1

[1] Includes the cost of purchase, maintenance, fuel, tax and insurance.

Travel to Airports

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what percentage of journeys made to *(a)* Gatwick, *(b)* Heathrow, *(c)* Stansted and *(d)* Luton airports were made by *(i)* train, *(ii)* bus and *(iii)* other road vehicles in the latest year for which figures are available. [80846]

Mr. Jamieson: In 2001, the percentage of journeys made by train to Gatwick was 21.2 per cent. (9 per cent. bus/coach and 69.8 per cent. other road vehicles). For Heathrow, the corresponding proportions were 21.5 per cent. train (ie rail and tube), 13.1 per cent. bus/coach, and 65.4 per cent. other road vehicles. At Stansted, the proportions were : 27.3 per cent. train, 7.6 per cent. bus/coach, and 65.1 per cent. other road vehicles. The proportions recorded at Luton are 26.1 per cent. bus/coach and 73.9 per cent. other road vehicles.

TREASURY

Employment (Leeds)

Mr. Battle: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his latest estimate is of the number of people in *(a)* Leeds and *(b)* Leeds, West constituency who are in *(i)* temporary and (ii) part-time employment. [81488]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Colin Mowl to John Battle, dated 20 November 2002:

The National Statistician has been asked to reply to your Parliamentary Question about number of people in temporary and part-time employment in Leeds. I am replying in his absence. (81918)

The Labour Force Survey (LFS) gives estimates of temporary and part-time employment levels for Local Authority Districts. The latest available estimates are for the three month period ending August 2002. The Office for National Statistics publishes employment rates, but not levels for parliamentary constituencies.

The estimate of the number of temporary employees in Leeds Local Authority District, for the three month period ending August 2002, is 20,000. The estimate of the number of people in part-time employment is 94,000. These estimates are from the LFS. They are not seasonally adjusted and have not yet been adjusted to take account of the recent Census 2001 results.

Re-weighted LFS estimates for local areas using 2001 Census population information will be available from Summer 2003.

Minimum Wage

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what his latest estimate is of the number of people who no longer receive one or more of income support, housing benefit or council tax benefit as a result of the introduction of the minimum wage. [80607]

John Healey: The information requested is not available.

Banking Information

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if discussions with the Swiss Government regarding the exchange of banking information are on-going; and if he will make a statement; [80741]

(2) whether he supports the imposition of sanctions on Switzerland if it does not agree to sharing banking information; [81035]

(3) what discussions he has had with his EU counterparts regarding Switzerland's banking secrecy laws; and if he will make a statement. [80742]

Dawn Primarolo: In accordance with the mandate agreed by ECOFIN Council on 16 October 2001, the presidency and Commission are continuing negotiations with the Swiss Government on the application of measures equivalent to the system that would apply under the draft Savings Directive to member states. The Chancellor and other EU Finance Ministers discuss progress at meetings of the ECOFIN Council. Any decision on what steps to take if a successful conclusion to the negotiations were not to be reached, would be made at that time.

Climate Change Levy

Norman Baker: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make it his policy not to exempt the nuclear industry from the climate change levy. [80866]

John Healey: It has been the Government's policy since the climate change levy was announced not to exempt nuclear energy.

Compliance Costs

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he expects to complete the studies into the compliance costs of excise duty and international trade, referred to in his answer of 15 October 2002, *Official Report*, column 600W; and if he will make a statement. [80639]

John Healey: These studies are still in progress. Ministers will consider the results at the completion of each study.

Customs and Excise

Mr. Moore: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether the Extra Statutory Concession 3.5 in notice 48 (1999 edition) applies to advice given by Customs and Excise officials *(a)* in writing and *(b)* by telephone. [81659]

John Healey: The current (March 2002) edition of Notice 48 cancelled and replaced the December 1999 edition. Extra Statutory Concession 3.5 remains the same and provides that

> "If a Customs and Excise officer, with the full facts before him, has given a clear and unequivocal ruling on VAT in writing or, knowing the full facts, has misled a registered trader to his detriment, any assessment of VAT due will be based on the correct ruling from the date the error was brought to registered person's attention."

The concession therefore applies in these terms not only to incorrect rulings in writing but also to incorrect oral rulings. Oral rulings include those given by telephone.

Departmental Accounts

Norman Baker: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list, for each year since 1997 and by Department, the total amount of fines levied against Government Departments for the incomplete return of departmental accounts. [81116]

Mr. Boateng: The accounts of Departments are presented to Parliament under the provisions of the Government Resources and Accounts Act 2000, and prior to that, the Exchequer and Audit Department Acts 1866 and 1921. The legislation makes no provision for fines for incomplete returns.

Enhanced Capital Allowance Scheme

Mr. Gareth Thomas: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much has been claimed under the Enhanced Capital Allowance scheme since April 2001; and if he will make a statement. [81777]

Dawn Primarolo: I regret that the information is not yet available.

EU Aviation Fuel Tax

Norman Baker: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what assessment he has made of *(a)* the practicality and *(b)* the potential revenue stream arising from the introduction of taxation on aviation fuel used in domestic flights; [80840]

(2) what progress is being made towards the introduction of an EU aviation fuel tax regime. [80841]

John Healey: The Government are aware of practical issues surrounding the taxation of aviation fuel used in domestic flights, including the encouragement of 'tankering' fuel from abroad. Revenue streams would depend on a variety of factors including the level of duty and degree of tankering. We will publish shortly an Air Transport White Paper that will examine the potential for using economic instruments to encourage the aviation industry to take more account of its external costs.

The European Council of Finance Ministers has asked the European Commission to pursue with the International Civil Aviation Organisation the possibility of taxing aviation turbine fuel.

Euro

Mr. Howard: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if British entry to the euro is conditional upon reform of the Stability and Growth Pact. [80416]

Ruth Kelly: The determining factor underpinning any Government decision on UK membership of EMU is the national economic interest and whether the economic case for joining is clear and unambiguous. The Five Economic Tests will define whether a clear and unambiguous case can be made.

Financial Services Authority

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment his Department has made of the role of the Financial Services Authority in the collapse of the split capital investment trusts; if he will set up an independent inquiry into this issue; and if he will make a statement. [81792]

Ruth Kelly: The FSA is obliged under the terms of the Financial Services and Markets Act (2001) to produce an annual report assessing performance against its statutory objectives of maintaining confidence in the financial system, promoting public understanding of the financial system, securing an appropriate degree of protection for consumers and reducing the potential for financial firms to be used for financial crime. It is through this mechanism that the FSA is primarily held accountable to Ministers and Parliament.

Grants

Mr. McLoughlin: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the grants funded by his Department for which individual members of the public and organisations may apply; and if he will make a statement as to *(a)* the total of such funding in the last financial year, *(b)* the total number of awards and *(c)* their administrative costs. [82194]

Ruth Kelly: HM Treasury makes no such grants.

Higher-rate Taxpayers

Mr. Brady: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what statistics are compiled by the Inland Revenue on the geographical distribution of higher rate taxpayers; and if they can be broken down by *(a)* local authority area and *(b)* post code. [80991]

Dawn Primarolo: Estimates for higher rate taxpayers are based on the Inland Revenue's Survey of Personal Incomes (SPI). The basic geographical unit on the SPI is post code and this is converted to various higher level geographical locations.

We would not be able to provide reliable estimates of higher rate taxpayers by post code as the sample size would be too small.

Income Tax

Mr. Edward Davey: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what research has been conducted *(a)* by his Department and *(b)* for his Department in the last five years concerning changes to income tax. [81700]

Dawn Primarolo: I refer the hon. Member to the Inland Revenue website—www.inlandrevenue.gov.uk/research

Maundy Money

Norman Baker: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the annual cost is of manufacturing Maundy Money; and who bears that cost. [81583]

Ruth Kelly: The cost of manufacturing Maundy Money is commercially sensitive and it would not be appropriate to disclose it, as provided for under Exemption 13 of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information. The Royal Household pays face value for the coins that Her Majesty distributes. There is a shortfall between this and the cost of production, which is largely made up by a limited number of discretionary sales of Maundy Money sets.

Ministerial Cars

Norman Baker: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the application of the rules relating to company car taxation in respect of cars used by Ministers, and which are provided by the Government Car and Despatch Agency. [81139]

Dawn Primarolo: The tax treatment of travel and subsistence for the Speaker, Ministers and Opposition office-holders is covered by the specific provisions in section 200AA of the Taxes Acts.

Mortgage Administration Services

Mr. Curry: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) whether all suppliers of mortgage administration services in the UK are subject to VAT; whether joint venture companies between UK mortgage lenders and US service providers have been granted exemptions from VAT; and if he will make a statement; [80484]

(2) which member states of the EU impose VAT on outsourced mortgage administration services; and at what rates. [80485]

John Healey: Mortgage administration services are VAT exempt when supplied by the mortgage provider but are liable to VAT when provided by a third party. Supplies between two companies in a joint venture will be disregarded for VAT purposes if the companies are part of the same VAT group. Customs and Excise are currently taking action to prevent artificial structures involving joint ventures being used to bring third party companies within VAT groups. Little information is available on the VAT treatment of outsourced mortgage administration services in other member states, although the French advise that they would also charge VAT on outsourced loan administration services.

National Insurance

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the level of unpaid national insurance contributions in fiscal years *(a)* 1998–99, *(b)* 1999–2000 and *(c)* 2000–01; and if he will make a statement. [80650]

Dawn Primarolo: National Insurance Contributions (N ICs) identified as due, but not paid and subsequently written off amounted to £218 million in 1998–99; £188 million in 1999–2000; and £180 million in 2000–01. This represents 0.4 per cent., 0.3 per cent. and 0.3 per cent. of the total NICs receipts for those years, respectively.

NICs may be written off where pursuit is unlikely to be successful, for example because a company is insolvent; or where it is regarded as neither practical nor cost effective to pursue the debt, for example because the debtor has gone abroad.

Office for National Statistics

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will place in the Library the recommendations that ONS made on each project on which the public sector classification committee has been asked to comment since 1 January; and if he will make a statement. [80117]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from L. Cook to Mr. Matthew Taylor, dated 20 November 2002:

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your recent question on the recommendations that ONS has made on each project that the Public Sector Classification Committee (PSCC) has considered since 1 January. (80117)

In some cases decisions are taken on projects that are confidential or market sensitive and these can not be revealed. There are other cases that the PSCC considers relating to issues raised internally. Where these do not lead to any advice being offered to other government departments I have not included them.

Decisions on New Tax Credits and Network Rail and its borrowing are fully described on the National Statistics website (www.statistics.gov.uk). There were three decisions of this type.

The other projects on which ONS's PSCC has offered advice are listed below with a description of the advice offered.

Support for insurance of terrorist risks to aviation industry

Troika is classified as a public financial corporation until 1 November 2001, when it is reclassified as a private insurance corporation. Government guarantee is a contingent liability. Government receipts should be counted as dividends, payments as capital transfers. The Government's decision to temporarily waive fees gives rise to an imputed subsidy, but amounts involved were de minimis.

Electricity Companies Renewables Obligation

ONS intend to classify the amounts redistributed to generators as imputed tax receipts and subsidy payments. The general issue will be referred to Europe for discussion.

Diamond Synchrotron

Classification as a public corporation.

Offshore Petroleum Licensing—20th round

Receipts of fees and royalties follow usual classification as rents.

Guarantees for loans to Railtrack plc in administration

Upon specified conditions being met, the guarantees would be classified as contingent liabilities. The fee received by government is classified as a service fee and netted off government consumption. An imputed subsidy will be recorded for the benefit that arises from the guarantee.

OFCOM

Classified as central government, part of its income classified as quasi-corporate.

Salvaged property (HMS Sussex)

Goods classified as valuables. At the time the government was informed of the discovery an economic reappearance of an asset occurs. The value of these assets may later change when more information is known about them. Government payments to the salvage company are recorded as consumption. Receipts from sales are classified as disposal of valuables and recorded at price received, after deducting commissions/fees paid to auctioneers. If payments to the salvage company are made in the valuable rather than currency, it would still be treated as consumption, but balanced by an imputed sale of the valuable.

PFI Contracts

Norman Baker: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the *(a)* actual and *(b)* anticipated annual payments by Government for each year from 1997 to 2020 are in respect of PFI contracts already entered into. [81117]

Ruth Kelly: *(a)* Actual PFI expenditure can be found in notes to the individual resource accounts of Departments.

(b) Detailed figures setting out estimates of future payments to be made under PFI contracts are published in the Financial Statement and Budget Report each year. Table C19 of Budget 2002 includes the latest projections of estimated payments for services provided under the Private Finance Initiative for the years 2002–03 to 2027–28.

In line with past practice, these figures will be updated shortly.

Social Capital

Sue Doughty: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what measures of social capital his Department uses to guide policy decisions; and if he will make a statement. [80410]

Ruth Kelly: Policy decisions are guided by a number of measures. The Treasury uses measures on individual facets of social capital as and when appropriate in policy making. Social capital is recognised to be a multi-dimensional concept and I understand there is an on-going research project by ONS aiming to develop an analytical framework that can be used to organise the available statistical information on social capital.

Working Families Tax Credit

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will place a copy of the report on the take-up of the working families tax credit within London in the Library. [81952]

Dawn Primarolo: No such report exists.

World Bank

John Barrett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what progress is being made to increase the number of executive directors representing southern governments on the Board of the World bank. [80935]

John Healey: The UK's White Paper on International Development, published in December 2000, highlighted the need for developing countries to have a more effective voice in international institutions. And at the Annual Meetings of the IMF and World bank, the Development Committee called on these institutions to prepare a joint paper on broadening and strengthening the participation of developing countries in International Financial Institution decision making for the spring meetings in April 2003. It is within the context of this broader discussion on increasing the voice of developing countries that we expect representation on the Executive Board to feature. The UK would welcome positive consideration of ways to increase the representation of developing countries on the Executive Board, and African countries in particular. We will be working with the IMF and World bank over the coming months to explore this further.

World Bank and IMF

John Barrett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans there are to publish the minutes of the *(a)* World bank and *(b)* International Monetary Fund, and if he will make a statement. [80949]

John Healey: Enhancing the transparency of the IMF and World bank is a critical part of our work on strengthening crisis prevention, improving economic cooperation and promoting global stability and growth. Greater transparency can help strengthen policy frameworks, ensure that vulnerabilities are addressed at an early stage, and strengthen effectiveness and accountability.

(a) There are currently no plans for the minutes of World Bank Board Meetings to be published. However, since April 2001 the bank has been moving towards making the Executive Board more transparent, and we fully support these efforts. Most important decisions, including those relating to selected policy, strategy and topical issues, are announced through press releases or at press conferences of senior bank officials. Chairman's Concluding Remarks (and Summings Up) on discussions of Country Assistance Strategies, Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers/Interim Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers, Sector Strategy Papers and Heavily Indebted Poor Country documents are publicly available. Chairman's Concluding Remarks on discussions of other policy, strategy and topical issues can also be made publicly available—though this requires the agreement of the Executive Board. Approvals of individual lending operations are announced through issue of press releases and fact sheets providing summary data on the project.

(b) The IMF has also made real progress in its publication policy in recent years. There has been a significant increase in the publication of Public Information Notices summarizing the surveillance (Article IV) discussions of the Board, of Article IV reports themselves, and of Chairman's statements, news briefs and press releases following Board discussions on the use of Fund resources and on policy issues. Nevertheless, the UK believes that the IMF can build on this progress and that there is considerable scope for further reform. The IMF's Transparency policy was discussed by the Executive Board in June 2002. At this

discussion the UK supported the proposal that access to Executive Board minutes should be accelerated from 20 years to five years and pressed for even further acceleration. Unfortunately, this view was not shared by others on the Board and access to Board minutes was only reduced to 10 years.

To promote greater transparency in the UK about our role in the IMF, we publish an Annual Report to Parliament on the UK and the IMF. This includes the voting record of the UK Governor and Executive Director, and provides an indication of the position we take at Board discussions. Only in the case of highly market sensitive information would we not provide this information. In our experience this is already strengthening public and parliamentary understanding of and support for the work of the IMF.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Coffee

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what action is being taken to diversify agricultural sectors away from coffee production in Sub-Saharan African countries. [80947]

Clare Short: Diversification requires the establishment of a more favourable environment at both domestic and international level. We are working to support a variety of activities within coffee producing countries in order to generate the economic growth, and other conditions, that provide enhanced opportunities for livelihood diversification. We are also working to improve trade access to OECD markets.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what discussions she has had with representatives of the *(a)* United Nations and *(b)* World bank regarding the coffee industry in *(i)* Central Africa, (ii) South America and (iii) India and Eastern Asia; and if she will make a statement. [80941]

Clare Short: My Department regularly interacts with different agencies of the United Nations, the World bank and other partners to discuss the economic situation, including performance of different industries and commodity, in the three geographical regions mentioned. These are complex issues and I do not intend to make a statement at this time.

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what action is being taken to encourage international coffee roaster companies to carry out value added processing within developing countries. [80945]

Clare Short: Coffee processing involves the transformation of green coffee beans into a number of products including roast and ground, soluble (instant) coffee, decaffeinated coffee extracts and various speciality coffees. The decision to undertake coffee processing in the developing country of origin is a strictly commercial one. This decision is undoubtedly influenced by a number of considerations such as the domestic operating environment (e.g. reliability of supporting infrastructure), assurance of bean supply and quality requirements, transport costs, the buy-in strategies adopted by retailers, packaging and labelling requirements as well as size of the domestic market and trade access to other markets. The UK, through its development programme and other endeavours at the international level, is supporting a range of actions designed to create a more favourable investment climate in many coffee producing countries.

Africa (Health Budget)

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what proportion of her Department's health budget for the current year for Africa is allocated directly to *(a)* hospitals, *(b)* clinics, *(c)* NGOs and *(d)* Governments; and if she will make a statement. [80551]

Clare Short: Last year (2001–02) DFID estimates its spend on health related activities in Sub-Saharan Africa was £108 million. This figure does not include money channelled through multilateral agencies.

It is not easy to disaggregate this figure according to the categories listed, nor is it sensible. Where possible through provision of direct budgetary support, we support Governments' entire health systems. Where we provide assistance to other sectors, this too can contain 'Health' spend, for example mainstreaming teaching on HIV/AIDs and reproductive health into a country's national curriculum.

Angola

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent assessment her Department has made of the reintegration of ex-soldiers into civil society in Angola. [80566]

Clare Short: The formal reintegration of ex-soldiers has not yet started in Angola. The Government of Angola is in the process of developing its Angola Demobilisation and Reintegration Programme (ADRP), with assistance from the World bank. Until the ADRP has been agreed, little progress will be made on putting in place appropriate social structures to receive the ex-combatants. It is therefore essential that the ADRP is finalised as soon as possible, in close collaboration with the international community. This programme should be consistent with the Government's own Norms for Return and Resettlement. It should also be set in a broader framework encompassing the return of refugees and internally displaced people (IDPs).

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment her Department has made of the progress of the National Reconciliation Programme in Angola. [80567]

Clare Short: Following the cease-fire in Angola, the National Reconciliation Programme has been replaced by the National Commission for the Social and Productive Reintegration of the Demobilised and Displaced. The new commission's detailed priorities have not been made clear to the international community; nor have the spending plans associated with them. With the help of the World bank, the Government of Angola is working on an immediate post-conflict recovery plan which the international community expects will be presented to donors at a conference organised by the Government of Angola in the first

quarter of 2003. Until the international community has seen the document, it is difficult to comment on the Government's plans.

Without national reconciliation, a fully inclusive national dialogue, and sustainable poverty reduction, the cease-fire is unlikely to be transformed into a lasting peace. We take every opportunity to make this clear to the Government of Angola. My Department is establishing an office in the British embassy in Luanda which will help to strengthen further HMG's efforts to ensure a peaceful transition in Angola.

Charities and Donor Agencies

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on co-operation with charities and donor agencies; what recent progress has been made; and what proposals she has for further co-operation. [80988]

Clare Short: My Department enjoys close relations with both charities (NGOs) and the wider donor community. The production of our first White Paper in 1997 laid the foundations for unprecedented inclusion of NGOs in policy and strategy consultation. Development charities have been helpful in enabling my Department to produce policy papers on issues such as the rights of the disabled, inclusion of the elderly in the development process and access to clean water.

Consultation with NGO community lead to changes in the way my Department supported UK civil society. This included the replacement of our main funding channels for NGOs (the Joint Funding Scheme and block grants) by the Civil Society Challenge Fund (CSCF) and Partnership Programme Agreements (PPA). Under our CSCF we currently fund over 200 individual projects with around 80 UK civil society organisations at an annual cost in excess of £10 million.

We currently have PPAs with 15 major UK development NGOs and propose a further round of negotiations next year. PPAs are strategic level engagements, which provide a framework for constructive dialogue and sharing of ideas on major development issues.

My Department has regular engagement with other bilateral donors, where policies and views can be openly shared and regular DFID representation at the EC NGO co-financing meetings in Brussels where our interests as well as NGO's concerns can be raised and discussed.

We have began a series of discussions with our counterparts at the Community Fund and Comic Relief in order to exchange information and ideas and hope to strengthen these links further through joint evaluations of co-funded projects.

We are currently in the process of formalising a Strategic Funding Agreement with the main umbrella organisation representing the British NGOs working in development (BOND). This agreement further strengthens co-operation and mutual understanding between my Department and the NGO community.

Congo

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what discussions her Department has had with the Government of the Democratic Republic of Congo concerning sexual crimes being committed against women by the armies; and what pressure her Department is putting on the Government of the Democratic Republic of the Congo to investigate such crimes and bring perpetrators to justice. [80561]

Clare Short: My Department is extremely concerned about the situation in Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and the unacceptably high levels of violent crimes, including rape, committed against women. We maintain links with a number of human rights organisations including Human Rights Watch and local rights organisations based in eastern DRC, which are involved in the monitoring, and provision of support, to women victims of crime. The high rates of rape and sexual violence have mostly occurred in areas that are not under Government control where militias are operating and disorder is widespread.

Through our embassies in Kinshasa and Kigali, and through direct contact with local authorities when visiting the east, the UK Government have discussed the issue of rape, and the urgent need to address issues of justice, with representatives from all sides with whom we have contact. We do not have contact with the ex-Far and Interahamwe and local Mai Mai groups. We also support a number of civil society organisations that are working in eastern DRC to monitor and raise rights abuses with authorities, as well as providing some limited support to women victims.

Eritrea

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent assessment her Department has made of the humanitarian situation in Eritrea; and how much money her Department is giving to help the people of Eritrea. [80558]

Clare Short: We are being kept informed by reports from our embassy in Eritrea and propose to send out one of our humanitarian advisers in the next month on an assessment mission. We understand that the Eritrea Consolidated Appeal is due to be launched on 19 November, which should include information on failed rains and forthcoming food shortages. In total we have given £1,350,000 to the International Committee of the Red Cross' 2002 Appeal for Eritrea. In addition, through our Small Grants Scheme, we have disbursed some funds to health centres run by the Catholic Church to buy food supplements for malnourished children under five, pregnant women and lactating mothers.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent discussions her Department has had with *(a)* the Government of Eritrea, *(b)* the Eritrean Relief and Refugee Committee and *(c)* the UN over the humanitarian situation in Eritrea. [80559]

Clare Short: I met with the President of Eritrea at the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg and have since then had telephone

conversations with him to discuss the situation in Eritrea and the region. I also have regular meetings with the Eritrean ambassador in London.

Our ambassador in Eritrea, as well as one of his staff, have attended various UN and Eritrean Relief and Refugee Committee meetings to discuss the humanitarian situation in Eritrea and have reported back to DFID and FCO.

Ethiopia

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment her Department has made of the current food needs of the people of Ethiopia; what proportion of these are being met by the international community; how much of these food needs are being met by Britain; and whether her Department intends to increase the volume of food being delivered to Ethiopia. [80577]

Clare Short: We are keeping the humanitarian situation in Ethiopia under continuous review, using the reports and assessments made by the Government and international agencies involved. WFP remain concerned about prospects for February and March, when needs are expected to be high, though they estimate that current pledges of food aid to be sufficient to meet needs until mid-January 2003. The Ethiopian Food Security Reserve is expected on current estimates to have sufficient stocks available until April.

We are taking careful note of the WFP and Government of Ethiopia reports and appeals. As always we remain committed to playing our part in the international response to humanitarian need, which includes increasing UK bilateral contributions when necessary.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development when *(a)* she and *(b)* Ministers in her Department last visited Ethiopia; and when she next intends to do so. [80578]

Clare Short: The last ministerial visit to Ethiopia from my Department was my visit to Ethiopia in November 2000. I plan to visit Ethiopia in January 2003 to attend the Economic Commission for Africa Big Table meeting, and for discussions with the Ethiopian Government.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development which non-governmental organisations working in Ethiopia she has consulted regarding the current humanitarian situation in Ethiopia; and on what dates. [80600]

Clare Short: There is frequent in-country dialogue between DFID and non-governmental organisations, as well as other donors. Since mid-2002, when early warning signs of problems were emerging, the Ethiopian Government, donors and NGOs have been working closely together to assess the situation and frame an appropriate response. This dialogue will continue as we move into 2003. We also invited a range of NGOs to a meeting that we hosted in DFID on 20 November to discuss the humanitarian situation in Ethiopia.

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what discussions her Department has had with the UN's Emergency Unit for Ethiopia regarding the humanitarian situation in Ethiopia and the response of the international community to the humanitarian situation facing Ethiopia. [80601]

Clare Short: We regularly discuss the humanitarian situation in Ethiopia with the UN's Emergency Unit for Ethiopia. In 2002 we have funded the unit to enable them to strengthen their co-ordination role. We welcome the fact that the Ethiopian Government have led needs assessments and responses in 2002 and believe that the UN-EUE has played a valuable role in supporting them.

European Bank for Reconstruction and Development

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the outcome of her meeting with the President of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development on 21 October. [80563]

Clare Short: President Lemierre and I met primarily to discuss the 2003 EBRD Annual Meeting in Tashkent, which the UK will chair. The people of Central Asia need progress with poverty reduction, regional stability and the fight against corruption. President Lemierre and I agreed that it was timely for the EBRD Annual Meeting to be in Central Asia, in order to focus attention on the challenges facing the region. The meeting will be a good opportunity for a full and open discussion of progress in achieving economic and political transition, tackling the region's poverty, improving the investment climate and increasing regional co-operation.

Healthcare and Education

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what proportion of overseas aid has been directed to basic health care and education services for children, and how much this is in real terms, in each year since 1997. [80987]

Clare Short: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer to the hon. Member for Richmond Park (Dr. Tonge) on 7 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 674W.

HIV/AIDS

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what progress is being made towards increasing the levels of HIV/Aids testing in Zimbabwe. [80936]

Clare Short: Zimbabwe has made progress in building and meeting demand for Voluntary Counselling and Testing for HIV (VCT). Access is rapidly increasing through the "New Start" network of VCT centres, a campaign implemented by Population Services International (PSI) and the Ministry of Health and Child Welfare. 99,000 clients have visited new start centres since the campaign started in 2000. PSI aims to more than double the yearly VCT client flows by the end of 2004 while maintaining high quality services and broadening access. USAID and DFID are PSI-Zimbabwe's major supporters, with DFID providing nearly £7 million of flexible support for VCT and other HIV prevention activities.

Human Rights

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will list the countries which the Government assesses as having poor records on human rights, and in which CDC Capital Partners makes investments. [80565]

Clare Short: We believe in general that it is best to engage constructively with states on a broad range of human rights issues. Such an approach will help poor people to realise their rights and reduce violations. We do not maintain a list of countries with a "poor" human rights record. This is no part of the remit of CDC Capital Partners, which invests in businesses, not in governments.

IT Security

Brian White: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps she has taken to review the security of the Department's IT system; and how many digital attacks there were on the Department's system in *(a)* October and *(b)* 2002. [80775]

Clare Short: 1. DFID has taken a number of steps in recent months to review the security arrangements for the Department's IT systems. A review of the anti-virus (AV) arrangements is currently under way, and is expected to complete soon with any resulting changes implemented by the end of this year. Secondly, another review is considering the way in which classified information is handled and stored within the Department's IT systems. The review paper and conclusions are due to be put before the highest level IT Steering Committee (the KCC) later this month, with accepted recommendations being implemented progressively throughout 2003.

2. DFID's IT systems were subjected to one digital attack during October. The new BugBear virus entered the system via a visiting user from our Dar-es-Salaam office accessing his HotMail account, and the virus subsequently infected 15 PCs. This entry point was immediately plugged when it was discovered.

3. During the rest of 2002 there were two other digital attacks on the systems. In April DFID was infected with the Elkern virus. This entered DFID before there was a pattern file available to detect it. In all, one server and 500 PCs were affected—about one in six of the user population. The pattern file was applied as soon as it was available from the AV software supplier, and no re-infections have been reported. In November, a routine sweep of the databases revealed one occurrence of the Redlof/A virus, which had infected 26 files on one user machine.

4. Virus detection is applied at the DFID Internet Gateway, before messages are allowed into the systems. Logging is not generally left switched on because the logfiles fill up very quickly. However, logging is periodically captured and examined. During the period 8–15 November, 513 messages appearing at the gateway were found to contain viruses and were prevented from entering.

5. There were no hacking attempts on DFID systems during the year.

Paramedical Health Personnel

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on her Department's policy on the creation of paramedical health personnel to administer simple treatments in developing countries. [80552]

Clare Short: Health systems in many poor countries do not have the capacity to deliver drugs and care in a safe and effective way. The Government's long term strategy is to help poor countries develop functioning health systems with the capacity to provide a series of different outputs. Encompassing preventive, health promoting, acute and chronic curative care and services. Human resources are central to functioning health systems and our work with partner countries includes support for locally appropriate strategies and plans to ensure health systems have the right staff. In some cases, such strategies include the training and deployment of various staff to perform basic treatments. Since 1997, we have committed over £1 billion, to help developing countries put in place and strengthen effective health care systems. We are also working with the World bank, the World Health Organisation and other multilateral partners on this long term agenda.

Per Capita Aid

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much aid her Department provides per capita to *(a)* Afghanistan; *(b)* Bosnia; and *(c)* Rwanda, and what proportion of this is disbursed *(i)* bilaterally and (ii) through the European Commission. [80572]

Clare Short: UK bilateral official development assistance (oda) to Afghanistan, Bosnia and Rwanda is set out in the table:

	UK oda (£ million)	*Population (million)*	*UK oda per capita (£)*
2000			
Afghanistan	8.4	26.6	0.32
Bosnia	4.7	4	1.18
Rwanda	34.8	8.5	4.09

In addition we estimate the following amounts of UK funds were disbursed through the European Commission in each of the countries:

	UK imputed multilateral shares via EC (£ million)	*Per capita UK imputed shares via EC (£)*
2000		
Afghanistan	2.2	0.08
Bosnia	23.9	5.98
Rwanda	6.0	0.71

Safe Water

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what measures will be taken by the Government to reach its targets for access to basic sanitation and in developing water efficiency plans. [81057]

Clare Short: The Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) provide the focus of my Department's work. My Department is working to build an effective response by the international system to support developing countries in reducing poverty and achieving the MDGs. This includes supporting the United Nations Development Programme in monitoring progress towards the MDGs country by country.

The World Summit on Sustainable Development (WSSD) in Johannesburg extended the MDG target on access to water to include sanitation. It also made a commitment to develop integrated water resources management and water efficiency plans by 2005. My Department is working with developing countries, other development agencies and financial institutions to ensure that support is provided so that these commitments are kept and the MDG targets are achieved. In particular, we currently support several major multilateral initiatives including:

The Global Water Partnership, a multi-donor funded international network to foster integrated water resource management.

The Nile Basin Initiative, established by the riparian states with World bank support to realise the development potential of the Nile and to contribute to poverty and conflict reduction in the region.

Water and Sanitation Program (WSP), a multi-donor programme administered by the World bank. Its mission is to alleviate poverty by helping the poor gain sustained access to improved water and sanitation services.

The Water Supply and Sanitation Collaborative Council (WSSCC), a concerted multi-donor organisation designed to raise awareness and the political profile of sanitation, hygiene and safe water.

My Department is also participating in the EU Water Initiative which is aimed at creating strategic partnerships to achieve the WSSD goals on clean water and sanitation. It also promotes co-operation between countries sharing an international river basin in managing their water resources and aims to improve the efficiency of existing financing mechanisms for water infrastructure through better donor co-ordination.

In addition to multilateral co-operation, our commitment to achieve the 2005 water management and 2015 water and sanitation targets includes bilateral programmes in many countries in the developing world including Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nepal, India, South Africa, and Nigeria.

My Department also funds resource centres dedicated to enhancing communication, knowledge transfer and co-operation between DFID, its partners and other organisations in the management of water resources as well as in the fields of environmental health, water supply and sanitation. Additionally, through the Knowledge and Research (KaR) programme, my Department is funding research projects that investigate key water resource management questions and cost effective means of delivering water, sanitation and hygiene services.

Visceral Leishmaniasis Disease

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assistance she has offered for the treatment of patients suffering from the outbreak of visceral leishmaniasis disease in Southern Sudan. [80940]

Clare Short: So far in 2002 we have provided a total of £743,048 to Medecins sans Frontieres for three urgent health care projects in southern Sudan, which include the treatment of people suffering from the outbreak of visceral leishmaniasis (also known as kala-azar).

CABINET OFFICE

Car and Despatch Agency

Norman Baker: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office under what circumstances Ministers are allowed to use official cars provided by the Government Car and Despatch Agency when not on official business. [81118]

Mr. Alexander: Guidance to Ministers on the use of official cars is set out in "Travel by Ministers" copies of which can be found in the House Libraries and on the Cabinet Office website.

Norman Baker: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office (1) what has been the average cubic capacity of cars within the Government Car and Despatch Agency fleet in each year since 1997; [81140]

(2) if he will list the consultants employed by the Government Car and Despatch Agency in 2001–02; and what the total cost of employing consultants was in this period. [81119]

Mr. Alexander: The responsibility for the provision of ministerial cars and drivers has been delegated under the terms of the Framework Document to the Government Car Despatch Agency. I have asked its Chief Executive Mr. Nick Matheson to write to the hon. Member. Copies of his letter will be placed in the Libraries of the House.

Civil Defence, Wales

Mr. Llwyd: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office when he last met a representative of the National Assembly of Wales to discuss civil defence in Wales in cases of emergency. [81554]

Mr. Alexander: It is established practice under Exemption 2 of Part II of the Code of Practice on Access to Government Information not to disclose information relating to the proceedings of the Cabinet and its committees.

However, Ministers do regularly meet in Cabinet Committees to discuss issues relating to emergency planning, consequence management and resilience in the UK. The National Assembly for Wales is invited to participate in these committees wherever appropriate.

Special Advisers

Mr. Bellingham: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how many ministerial special advisers have been *(a)* appointed and *(b)* dismissed since the introduction of the EU Fixed Term Workers Directive; of those dismissed, how many had been employed as special

advisers for over four years; and if he will estimate the additional cost if advisers had been employed on a permanent basis. [80899]

Mr. Alexander: Since the introduction of the Fixed Term Employees (Prevention of Less Favourable Treatment) Regulations 2002 on 1 October 2002, Ministers have appointed seven special advisers. None have been dismissed. However two special advisers have had their contracts terminated, neither of whom had been in post for over four years. It is the Government's view that special advisers cannot be employed on a permanent basis for the reasons set out in my answer to the hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr. Hammond) on 15 October 2002, *Official Report*, column 732W.

NORTHERN IRELAND

11-plus Selection Procedure

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what alternative proposals he intends to put forward to replace the 11-plus selection procedure. [81266]

Jane Kennedy: No decisions have been taken about new transfer arrangements. In the responses to consultation a range of suggestions were made for future post-primary arrangements, including options involving academic selection, and my officials will be discussing these with our education partners and representatives of parents over the coming weeks. My aim is to develop a modern and fair education system which addresses the weaknesses of our current arrangements and enables all children to fulfil their potential.

HEALTH

GPs

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will ensure that relevant NHS staff, with particular reference to general practitioners, are trained in the prescription, administration, review and recording of medicines for older people. [80114]

Mr. Hutton: The Government do not specify the content of the general practice training curriculum. The General Medical Council's education committee has the general function of promoting high standards of medical education and co-ordinating all stages of medical education to ensure that students and newly qualified doctors are equipped with the knowledge, skills and attitudes essential for professional practice. The content and standards of postgraduate medical training in general practice is the responsibility of the joint committee on postgraduate training for general practice. Their role is that of custodians of quality standards in postgraduate medical education and practice. They are independent of the Department. Both these bodies have a clear interest in ensuring that doctors are equipped to deal with the range of circumstances they will encounter in practice.

Junior Doctors

Mr. Lyons: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many junior doctors have enrolled in the NHS since 1997. [80388]

Mr. Hutton: Pre-registration house officers are doctors who, having graduated from medical school, must successfully complete a year of work in the national health service in order to achieve full registration with the General Medical Council. The table shows the number of pre-registration house officers in England in the hospital sector, including those in both medical and dental specialty areas between 1997 and 2001. We do not collect data on the number of junior doctors enrolling in the NHS each year; the census is a snapshot of data as of 30 September in the appropriate year.

Number of pre-registration house officers in England, 1997 to 2001—DH Medical and Dental Census

Year	*Headcount*
1997	3,398
1998	3,496
1999	3,606
2000	3,691
2001	3,742

Locum Doctors

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many locum doctors from employment agencies have been found while working on temporary contracts in NHS hospitals to have already been removed or suspended from the GMC/GDC register in each of the last five years. [80401]

Mr. Hutton: The information requested is not collected centrally.

NHS Contracts

Sandra Osborne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what are the criteria for awarding contracts for the provision of NHS care from companies outwith the UK. [80900]

Mr. Hutton: In the case of overseas clinical teams working in the national health service, contracts are awarded on the basis of a number of criteria. The most important of these are clinical quality and competence, the capacity to deliver without compromising the provision of care in the provider's home nation, logistics and ease of access and value for money.

Sandra Osborne: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many health care companies from outwith the UK have contracts with the UK Government to provide care within the national health service; and if he will list the companies and countries involved. [80902]

Mr. Hutton: No contracts have been signed between the United Kingdom Government and overseas health care providers, as all such contracts are set up between overseas providers and national health service trusts. Three health care companies linked with overseas providers are currently providing acute elective care within the NHS: Netcare UK, Deluca Medical and Hessing Park Clinic. Netcare UK is a subsidiary of a

South African company. Deluca Medical acts on behalf of a French private hospital group. Hessing Park Clinic is a German hospital group.

Two trusts have signed contracts for service with individual doctors, rather than overseas health care companies. The first is working with doctors from South Africa, and the second is working with doctors from Ireland and Italy.

NHS Treatment

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) whether it is his policy that patients, by phoning NHS Direct, are given the details of *(a)* an emergency dental service and *(b)* an NHS dental practitioner with whom they can register; [81672]

(2) what his policy is on the *(a)* distance and *(b)* journey time that patients should travel as a maximum to reach *(i)* a general dental practitioner, (ii) a general medical practitioner, (iii) an emergency dentist and (iv) an accident and emergency unit. [81895]

Mr. Lammy *[holding answer 19 November 2002]:* Patients wishing to access national health service dentistry are advised to contact NHS Direct where they will be informed of sources of treatment within locally agreed standards. During 2001 each health authority set its own standards for how far patients should have to travel for treatment depending on whether the requirement was for emergency or urgent treatment or routine access and whether the patient was based in a rural or urban area. These standards took into account local travel patterns. Primary care trusts have now assumed responsibilities for these standards.

NHS Direct may also be able to inform patients of dental practitioners with whom they can register.

There is no maximum travel time or distance set for registering with a general practitioner, but patients are required to reside within the practice area of the GP with whom they wish to register. Most people prefer to register with a GP near to where they live and travel times and distances are generally short except in some remote or rural areas.

It is for health authorities and primary care trusts to plan the provision of local health services including the provision and location of emergency services. There is no maximum travel time or distance set for access to an accident and emergency unit.

NHS Trusts (Deficits)

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many NHS trusts are running financial deficits; and what the likely aggregate amount is of the deficits this financial year. [81023]

Mr. Hutton: The audited information in respect of the financial performance of national health service trusts for 2002–03 will be published in their individual annual accounts. The audited information will be available centrally in autumn 2003.

Overseas Nurses

Huw Irranca-Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent changes the Government have made to improve the system of registration for qualified overseas nurses who want to work in the NHS in England and Wales. [81010]

Mr. Hutton: Registration is the responsibility of the Nursing and Midwifery Council, which was established on 1 April 2002.

Prescriptions

Mr. Roy: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will review the regulations whereby two or more prescription charges are payable when two or more medicines are prescribed in circumstances where medicines are in one pack and cannot be taken separately. [80130]

Mr. Lammy: Prescription charging arrangements are a devolved matter. In England a charge is payable for each quantity of a drug or item supplied. This rule applies regardless of whether the different drugs are supplied in one pack or more. We have no plans to change these arrangements.

Smokies

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he is taking to curtail the illegal production of smokies from sheep. [80868]

Ms Blears: Enforcement of this issue lies with local authority environmental health and trading standards officers. The Food Standards Agency (FSA) is actively engaged in assisting local authority food law enforcement officers to combat the illegal production of smokies from sheep and goats. This assistance includes the issue of guidance to local authorities in June 2002 to clarify the legislation and the illegality of the product. A number of prosecutions have recently been initiated against producers, distributors and retailers of smokies. The FSA has also arranged a meeting with some of the local authorities involved with this issue and other stakeholders on 20 November 2002, to discuss the issue of smokies and the agency's co-ordinating role.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Violence

Mr. Greg Knight: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department if she will allow persons who *(a)* have a reasonable fear of domestic or other violence or *(b)* are deemed a security risk to be removed from the published version of the Electoral Register without losing their right to vote. [80785]

Yvette Cooper: I understand that the question of "anonymous registration" is being considered by the Electoral Commission in its current review of registration issues, and a consultation document is in preparation. The Government will consider any recommendations the Electoral Commission makes very carefully. Under regulations made in July electors can ask for their names to be removed from the edited version of the register that is for sale, but an Electoral Registration Officer currently has no discretion to omit the names of those who are entitled to be registered from the full version. While the Government are concerned to

ensure that vulnerable people are not put at risk, the electoral register is a public document and anonymous registration may make it difficult for members of the public and political parties to check whether eligible names have been included and ineligible names have not.

Correspondence

Linda Perham: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what the reason was for the delay in answering the letter of 9 January sent by the hon. Member for Ilford, North on behalf of Mr. Paul Michael Challis. [80508]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The delay was, as I stated in my letter to my hon. Friend dated 20 October, due to an administrative oversight. Once again, I apologise for the delay. I have asked that procedures for processing ministerial correspondence are reviewed in the light of this error.

Divorce (Religious Marriages) Act

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department when she expects the Divorce (Religious Marriages) Act 2002 to come into force. [80714]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Subject to the approval of the Family Procedure Rule Committee of the rules of court required to give effect to the Act, and Parliament, the Government intend to bring the Act into force in January or February 2003.

IT Security

Brian White: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what steps she has taken to review the security of the Department's IT system; and how many digital attacks there were on the Department's system in *(a)* October and *(b)* 2002. [80767]

Yvette Cooper: The Department is well advanced in its plans to implement an information security management system based on the BS7799 standard. This work has involved a major review and update of our IT security policy. We have undertaken risk reviews on all of our key information systems over the past 18 months, using the Cabinet Office approved CRAMM risk review methodology. A health check was undertaken on our data network in 2001 and a further health check will be undertaken in early 2003.

The number of cases of digital attacks detected was:

(a) 1 in October and

(b) 6 in 2002

These attacks were all virus attacks. They caused no damage to our key IT systems and were all detected by our virus protection defences. There were no hacking attacks.

Magistrates Court , York

Hugh Bayley: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department for how many days York magistrates court was closed during and following the flood in York in November 2000; what arrangements were made to transfer cases to other premises during the closure; what were the direct costs of transferring these cases and the indirect costs to the public purse of the loss of use of the York court; and what assessment she has made of the wider economic cost to those using York magistrates court and the lawyers representing them of the closure. [80995]

Yvette Cooper: The floods in York began to affect York magistrates court during the weekend of 4–5 November 2000. The courthouse did not close, and the courtrooms continued to operate. The cells were unusable from 4 November 2000 until 24 March 2001—a period of 140 days (20 weeks). Those cases involving defendants in custody were transferred to Selby magistrates court; all other cases continued to be dealt with at York.

Any additional revenue costs such as travelling expenses, heating/lighting at Selby were met from within the MCC's existing revenue budget.

No assessment has been made of the overall economic costs of transferring those cases to Selby.

Hugh Bayley: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department what damage was done to York magistrates court by the flood in November 2000; how much it cost to repair the damage; and whether the cost of the repairs was covered by insurance. [80996]

Yvette Cooper: The flood water entered the basement, the ground floor offices and the cell areas of the law courts, all of which were damaged and required repair. £35,000 was spent on replacing damaged furniture. The remaining costs—to repair the plasterwork and replace carpeting (a total of £55,000) were covered by the court's insurance policy.

Transsexuals

Norman Baker: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (1) what legislative changes she proposes following the case of Goodwin *v.* UK and within what timescale; and if these changes will encompass issues relating to pension entitlement of transsexual people; [81114]

(2) what progress the Interdepartmental Group on Transsexual People has made in considering the judgment in the case of Goodwin *v.* UK; what conclusion it has reached pursuant to this case; and if she will make a statement. [81115]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The Government's plan for implementing the judgment of the European Court of Human Rights in Goodwin *v.* The United Kingdom will be announced by the end of the year, following collective ministerial consideration of the recommendations of the Interdepartmental Working Group on Transsexual People. Pension entitlement is among the matters under consideration.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 21 November 2002

CABINET OFFICE

IT Security

Brian White: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what steps he has taken to review the security of his Department's IT system; and how many digital attacks there were on his Department's system in *(a)* October and *(b)* 2002. [80765]

Mr. Alexander: My Department is constantly reviewing the security of our IT networks in line with our Government Secure Intranet accreditation, and taking the latest security advice into consideration.

Within my Department and its Agencies there have been *(a)* 1,167 digital attacks in October and *(b)* 5,857 during 2002.

None of these resulted in compromise, loss or damage to any information held on the systems.

DEFENCE

Brigadier Gordon Kerr

Mr. Kevin McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will make a statement on the basis for his policy on Brigadier Gordon Kerr's giving evidence and otherwise co-operating with the inquiry undertaken by the Metropolitan Police Commissioner into collusion in Northern Ireland; [80127]

(2) what his policy is on allowing Brigadier Gordon Kerr to give evidence and otherwise to co-operate with the inquiry undertaken by the Metropolitan Police Commissioner into collusion in Northern Ireland. [80128]

Mr. Ingram: The Stevens Inquiry is an independent police investigation, with which the Ministry of Defence is fully co-operating. Issues relating to interviews with individuals in connection with this or any other criminal investigation are for the investigating authorities and the individuals themselves.

Afghanistan

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many personnel are deployed in Afghanistan; and how many of these are reserves. [80975]

Mr. Ingram: On 18 November 2002, three hundred and thirty two personnel were deployed in Afghanistan, including thirty-nine reservists.

Army (Non-British Citizens)

Sir Michael Spicer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what proportion of the British Army is comprised of soldiers who are not British citizens. [81096]

Mr. Ingram [*holding answer 18 November 2002*]: The number of soldiers, both trained and untrained, in the British Army as at 1 October 2002 was 111,670; of these 3,580 were non-British personnel. This represents 3.2 per cent. of the total strength. These figures exclude Gurkhas, Full Time Reserve Personnel (FTRS), Royal Irish Home Service and Mobilised Reservists.

Baton Rounds

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what technologies are available to assist the accuracy of the plastic baton round; what he estimates the comparative advantages of L18A1 *(a)* optical sight, *(b)* laser sights and *(c)* other options are; and what the estimated costs are of supplying each. [80623]

Mr. Ingram: We believe the L21A1 baton round, fired from the LI04 gun and using the LI 8 optical sight to have state of the art accuracy over its designed range. Such accuracy is critical in reducing the risk of serious injury. The L18A1 optical sight met the accuracy requirement for the baton round and is an intuitive sight to use. It is not possible to cost a laser sight for L21 without examining all the issues of the visibility of a laser spot when viewed through a visor at relevant ranges, against representative targets and in varying lighting conditions. Laser sights can cost between £50 and £1,000 dependent on specification.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what post-development studies have been carried out on the medical effects of the use of the L21A1 baton round; [80626]

(2) what progress has been made in the medical study of the effect of ricocheting L21A1 plastic baton rounds; and if he will place the results in the Library. [80622]

Mr. Ingram: An instrumented, technical trial of L21A1 in a typical operational environment has been conducted. This has involved ricochets from street furniture, kerbs, door frames and riot debris as well as inside buildings. The results from the instrumentation are currently being processed and any necessary reruns will be conducted. Once these results are available the medical implications of the ricochets will be assessed. The Sub-Committee, Defence Scientific Advisory Council will be invited to make a statement and it is my intention to place the statement in the Library of the House.

The L21A1 performance after one year in service was given in my answer on 30 October 22002, *Official Report*, column 800W. The assessment of the use of L21A1 at ranges from 1m to 20m was reported in the Home Office's answer of 6 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 312W.

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many hours of additional training is required to enable personnel to discharge a baton gun to be fired in situations other than public disorder; what the minimum distance is that a baton round may be discharged at a human target; what level of authorisation is required for this use of the baton gun; and what the reporting requirements are. [80627]

Mr. Ingram: Personnel undergo a three-day urban operations package as part of their operational training for use of the baton gun for situations other than public disorder. The circumstances under which members of the Armed Forces may discharge baton rounds at a human target, are set out in the guidance on the Rules of Engagement for the use of baton rounds, which has been previously placed in the Library of the House on 23 October *Official Report*, column 351W. The tactical use of a baton gun is controlled by either an officer or non-commisioned officer, although ultimate authority is vested in the individual baton gunner who is authorised to use the weapon as and when deemed necessary. If a baton round is fired, a baton log report, giving details of the incident, is completed and forwarded through the chain of command.

Business Information Systems

Mr. Jenkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will provide a breakdown of the money announced in the Spending Review for modernising business information systems across defence. [80969]

Mr. Ingram: The 2002 Spending Review provided the Ministry of Defence with an additional £578 million for modernising business information, logistics and support systems across defence. This will help to ensure the delivery of our ambitious efficiency target, freeing resources to strengthen the front line.

The allocation of these resources will be decided through the MOD's annual planning process which will be completed early next year, and will inform the Defence White Paper which it is planned to publish next summer.

Chiefs of Defence Staff

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the periods of office for the last five *(a)* Chiefs of Defence Staff, and *(b)* First Sea Lords after 1972. [82366]

Mr. Ingram: The information requested is set out in the table:

Last five chiefs of Defence Staff	*Period of office*
Admiral Sir Michael Boyce GCB OBE ADC	16.02.01-
General Sir Charles Guthrie GCB LVO OBE ADC Gen	02.04.97–15.02.01
Field Marshal Sir Peter Inge GCB	15.03.94–01.04.97
Marshal of the Royal Air Force Sir Peter Harding GCB DSc FRAeS CBIM	01.01.93–13.03.94
Field Marshal Sir Richard Vincent CBE KCB DSO	02.04.91–13.12.92
Marshal of the Royal Air Force Sir David Craig GCB OBE DSc MA FRAeS	10.12.88–01.04.91
First Sea Lords after 1972	
Admiral of the Fleet Sir Michael Pollock GCB MVO DSC ADC	13.03.71–02.03.74
Admiral of the Fleet Sir Edward Ashmore GCB DSC ADC	02.03.74–01.03.77
Admiral of the Fleet Sir Terence Lewin GCB DSC ADC	01.03.77–06.07.79
Admiral of the Fleet Sir Henry Leach GCB ADC	06.07.79–01.12.82
Admiral of the Fleet Sir John Fieldhouse GCB GBE ADC	01.12.82–02.08.85
Admiral of the Fleet Sir William Staveley GCB ADC	02.08.85–25.05.89
Admiral of the Fleet Sir Julian Oswald GCB ADC	25.05.89–02.03.93
Admiral of the Fleet Sir Benjamin Bathurst GCB ADC	02.03.93–10.07.95
Admiral Sir Jock Slater GCB LVO ADC	10.07.95–08.10.98
Admiral Sir Michael Boyce GCB OBE ADC	08.10.98–16.01.01
Admiral Sir Nigel Essenhigh GCB ADC	16.01.01–17.09.02
Admiral Sir Alan West KCB DSC ADC	17.09.02-

Civilian Firefighters

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many civilian firefighters are *(a)* employed and *(b)* resident in Army barracks in *(i)* Great Britain and (ii) Northern Ireland. [80616]

Mr. Ingram: There are currently 64 civilian fire fighters stationed at army establishments in Great Britain and 35 in Northern Ireland. Of those personnel there are three individuals, all officers, resident in service messes, two in Northern Ireland and one in Great Britain.

Continuous Attitude Survey

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many personnel in the *(a)* Army, *(b)* RAF and *(c)* Royal Navy were sent the last Continuous Attitude Survey and encouraged to answer; what proportion of the service members in each service this represents; how his Department ensures that the sample group asked and who reply are representative of the services as a whole; what the differential response rate is in each service by rank; and if he will make a statement. [81106]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 19 November 2002]:* The number of personnel that were sent the last Continuous Attitude Survey (CAS) for each Service is as follows: Naval Service 2,000; Army 4,006 and RAF 2,000. The proportion of personnel this represented for each Service was 5.3 per cent., 3.9 per cent. and 4.1 per cent. respectively, based on Trained Strength figures for United Kingdom regulars as at 1 September 2002.

In the Naval Service the distribution of the CAS is now carried out through the chain of command rather than directly to the individuals and personnel are encouraged to answer by the offer of participation in a prize draw. The sample groups are entirely random and the sample is sufficient to produce statistically significant results across all ranks.

In the Army the Adjutant General writes a personal letter to all unit Commanding Officers asking them to encourage individuals to respond to the survey. The selection criterion works on a rolling basis using the last two digits of Service numbers. The overall population of respondents is large enough to have statistical confidence that the results can be extrapolated against the wider military population.

For the Royal Air Force a letter from the Chief of Staff Air Member for Personnel accompanies each survey encouraging individuals to take part and emphasising the importance placed on the survey. The survey is a rank-stratified random sample. This means that while the number of personnel at each rank to whom the form is issued is determined in advance, taking into account previous response rates, the individuals who actually receive the form are chosen at random, using the last three digits of their Service number. This results in a total sample that is fairly representative of RAF personnel in rank, branch/trade, gender and ethnic group.

The response rates as a percentage for each Service by rank are shown below:

Naval Service

Rank	*Per cent.*
Lt Commander and above	69
Junior Officers	67
Senior Ratings ie. WOs, CPOs and POs	55
Junior Ratings ie. Able Rates and Leading Rates[1]	37

Note

[1] For the Naval Service the above level of detail is all that can be provided in the time available.

Army

Rank	*Per cent.*
2Lt/Lt	56
Capt	64
LtCol	71
Brig	40
L/Cpl	40
Sgt	53
WO2	62
2Lt/Lt	56
Maj	84
Col	65
Re	29
Cpl	47
SSgt	68
WO1	68

RAF

Rank	*Per cent.*
Pit Off + Fg Off	60
Flt Lt	75
Sqn Ldr	74
Wg Cdr	82
Gp Capt	70
SAC = LAC	47
Jnr Tech	55
Cpl	55

Defence Attachés

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the role and mandate of UK defence attachés posted overseas. [81107]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 19 November 2002]:* The principal role of defence attachés is to further the United Kingdom's defence diplomacy aims in the host country. There are six core attaché functions:

Support to defence diplomacy.

Provision of operational military advice and assistance.

Provision of politico-military advice.

Support to defence intelligence.

Support to defence exports.

Representation and administrative support.

Attachés deploy to post with a Chief of Defence Staff Directive they are his, and the three single service chiefs', representative in country. Depending on location, they may also receive a Directive from chief defence intelligence and/or the single service*(s)*.

Attachés are appointed to the staff of the ambassador/high commissioner whose instructions and policies they are to follow. Under the direction of the ambassador/high commissioner, they undertake any duties that advance the interests of the United Kingdom.

Defence Logistics Organisation

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many people have been employed by the Defence Logistics Organisation in each year since its creation. [80967]

Mr. Ingram: The requested information is shown in the table.

UK regular forces and permanent UK-based civilian staff in the Defence Logistics Organisation

Year	*Services*	*Civilian*	*Total*
April 2000	8,429	30,303	38,732
April 2001	7,406	25,219	32,625
April 2002	7,628	22,644	30,272

Notes:

1. Figures are full-time equivalent i.e. part-time staff are counted as a proportion of full-time hours worked.
2. The DLO was created in April 2000. Since then, the Defence Aviation Repair Agency (1 April 2001) and the Army Base Repair Organisation (1 April 2002) have become trading funds. The Strengths of Defence Aviation Repair Agency as at 1 April 2001 (4,418 civilians and 721 service personnel) and ABRO as at 1 April 2002 (2,019) are reflected in the losses in the above table.

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what computer systems he plans to procure for the Defence Logistics Organisation. [80970]

Mr. Ingram: The Defence Logistic Organisation (DLO) intends to procure a number of computer systems in support of its role to decide, provide for, and deliver effective and integrated logistic support and information services to the front line and across the Department at best value for Defence. These include the Defence Electronic Commerce Service (DECS), Management of Materiel in Transit (MMiT) computer system, the Bulk Fuel Inventory Solution (BFIS), the Postal and Courier Electronic Records (PACER)

system. Other requirements may be generated by the wider end-to-end review of logistics processes including the DLO, front-line commands and industry.

Departmental Projects

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what procedures he intends to follow so that the programme for the development of his Department's three sites at Northolt, Woolwich and Uxbridge will be largely self-funding. [82057]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence is currently examining the procurement options available for the delivery of project 'MOD Estate London (MoDEL), which will offer best value.

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he will make a further announcement about consultation and approval procedures in respect of his Department's three sites at Northolt, Woolwich and Uxbridge conditionally identified for development on 29 October; and what timescale and timetable he expects these projects to follow. [82058]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence currently has a two gate approvals process for projects of this magnitude. The Business Case for the first gate (Initial Gate) should be prepared by the end of this year. The Business Case for the second gate (Main Gate) should be prepared towards the latter half of 2003.

The current programme for the project details that implementation of the proposals is scheduled to take place between 2004–09.

Consultation with all stakeholders with an interest in the Defence Estate within Greater London, and a specific interest in project MoDEL, has already begun. This consultation will continue throughout the Department's approvals process and the project's implementation.

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which areas of each of the three sites at Northolt, Woolwich and Uxbridge will be developed as announced by his Department on 29 October; and what the balance sheet value was at 31 March of *(a)* the land and *(b)* the buildings on each site. [82060]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence is currently working with the relevant Local Authorities and other stakeholders to develop our proposals and to identify where on each of the Core Sites future development will take place.

The Balance Sheet value at the 1 April 2002 for the three Core Sites is as follows:

£

Core sites	*Land value*	*Building value*
RAF Northolt	70,000,000	28,281,400
RAF Uxbridge	55,000,000	22,863,973
Woolwich station	[1]20,925,000	[2]—

[1] Provisional figure only, actual not currently available.
[2] Not currently available.

Devonport Dockyard

Mr. Burnett: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence who was responsible for the security of Devonport Dockyard on Friday 15 November; if he will make a statement on a breach of security involving Trident nuclear submarines at Devonport Dockyard on 15 November; what consequential action his Department intends to take; what the state of alert was at Devonport on that day; what the state of security of the nuclear submarines was on that day; and what Royal Navy and other personnel were on the vessel on that day. [82278]

Mr. Ingram: The Naval Base Commander has overall responsibility for security of Devonport Naval Base. Devonport Management Ltd (DML), the owners of Devonport Dockyard and the nuclear licensed site, are responsible for the security of HMS VANGUARD and the refitting/refuelling facility where she is currently undergoing refit. The Naval Base and DML work closely together on security matters.

On the evening of 15 November two anti nuclear protesters gained access to HMS VANGUARD. The submarine, which has no weapons onboard, did not sustain any damage and safety was not compromised. A full inquiry into the incident is being conducted by a team comprising the Head of Security for the Defence Logistics Organisation, a senior MOD Police Officer and a MOD security specialist.

The state of alert at Devonport, and all UK military establishments, on 15 November was "Bikini Black Special". Some additional security measures had also been put in place at Devonport in preparation for an anti nuclear demonstration that was expected to take place during the weekend of 16/17 November. VANGUARD'S security status is classified as 'Non Vital Property'. This reflects that there are no weapons on board and also the extensive work the submarine and her reactor are undergoing during refit. At the time of the incident twelve contractors were working within the submarine and three Royal Navy personnel from the submarine were on duty but not onboard.

Farmers (Thailand)

Richard Younger-Ross: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what representation he has received regarding the Minute between the UK and Thailand Government signed on 19 October concerning those clauses that will help Thai farmers to export to the United Kingdom and Europe. [81205]

Dr. Moonie: None. The Joint Minute signed between Thailand and the United Kingdom on 19 October contains no clauses referring to Thai agricultural goods. It states the Government's intention to continue to offer advice and training in areas such as peace support operations and to share our experience of initiatives such as the Strategic Defence Review. It also refers to the modernisation of the Royal Thai Armed Forces and our support of BAE SYSTEMS legitimate efforts to supply a range of defence equipment. I will place a copy of the Joint Minute in the Library of the House.

Fijian Soldiers

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to make it easier for Fijian soldiers serving in British regiments to travel freely while on leave. [80698]

Mr. Ingram: Fijian personnel serving in the British Army may travel on leave within the United Kingdom without restriction. Those who wish to travel abroad during their leave periods, other than to their country of origin, are subject to the same visa and entry requirements as other Fijian nationals travelling abroad. Visa and entry requirements are constantly changing and may only be guaranteed by the embassy, consulate or high commission of the country an individual wishes to enter.

There are no specific plans, at present, to make any changes in this regard.

Fire Tenders (Northern Ireland)

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when the Department first used the term Yellow Goddess to describe a liveries military fire tender in Northern Ireland; and what other colours are available for fire tenders employed on overseas postings. [80618]

Mr. Ingram: The term Yellow Goddess was first used in 2002 to describe the livery of the fire tenders deployed to Northern Ireland and manned by the army. All fire tenders used by the Defence Fire Service on bases in the United Kingdom and overseas are red.

Firefighters' Dispute

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence under what powers the Government have authorised the employment of members of Her Majesty's armed forces for fire fighting duties; and if he will make a statement. [81722]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 19 November 2002]:* The involvement of the armed forces followed a request from the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister to assist with the provision of emergency fire and rescue cover in the event of a firemen's strike. A Defence Council Order for this purpose was signed under the Emergency Powers Act 1964.

The order permits troops to be used on non-military tasks which constitute urgent work of national importance, ensuring that instructions given to troops are lawful and subject to the provisions of the Service Discipline Acts.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to train defence personnel in the use of civilian fire equipment; and what estimates have been made of the time required to train personnel to an equivalent standard *(a)* to their current capacity to handle Green Goddesses, *(b)* to that of retained firefighters and *(c)* to that of full-time firefighters. [81958]

Mr. Ingram: In view of the additional challenges presented by the eight-day strike threatened by the Fire Brigades Union to begin on 22 November, a number of red fire engines have been made available from the National Fire College and the Scottish training college.

These will be deployed in a role similar to that of the Green Goddesses, while exploiting the advantages they offer in this role. Two days conversion training for existing Green Goddess crews began on 18 November to enable their deployment, should it be necessary, on 22 November. It would take on average a minimum of five weeks to train crews to the standard of retained firefighters and 12 weeks to that of full-time firefighters. Training times would, however, be dependent upon factors such as the numbers to be trained, the availability of personnel (instructors and trainees) and equipment and the time required to resource the training locations.

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many *(a)* soldiers, *(b)* sailors and *(c)* airmen are *(i)* deployed on firefighting activities, (ii) trained to use civilian fire equipment and (iii) currently training to use civilian fire equipment. [82011]

Mr. Ingram: Approximately 2,700 Royal Navy personnel, 7,400 Army personnel and 2,200 Royal Air force personnel (some 12,300 personnel in total) are currently available for firefighting duties during Fire Brigade Union strike periods. In addition, 6,700 personnel are employed in support roles. Of the 12,300 personnel, 2,134 are trained in specialist roles to use civilian-type fire equipment (rescue equipment/cutting gear, chemical protection suits etc). They make up the flexible response Breathing Apparatus Rescue Teams and Regional Equipment Support Teams. The total is broken down by service as follows:

	Total
Army	1,533
Navy	236
RAF	365

As at 19 November, 240 personnel were undergoing conversion training from Green Goddesses to red fire appliances. Once trained, they will be able to operate the red fire appliances in a role similar to that of the Green Goddesses.

Gurkha Welfare Trust

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what financial assistance his Department gives to the Gurkha Welfare Trust; and if he will make a statement. [82225]

Dr. Moonie: The Gurkha Welfare Trust (GWT) is a registered charity independent of the Ministry of Defence. It was established in 1969 to provide financial, medical and community aid to alleviate hardship and distress among Gurkhas and their families when they leave the British Army. The Department recognises the valuable work of the Trust and makes an annual grant in order to pay for the administrative costs of its field arm, the Gurkha Welfare Scheme (GWS). This year the Grant was £710,417. Our Defence Attache in Kathmandu heads the GWS. It spends over £6 million each year in Nepal and our contribution enables nearly all the money raised by the Trust through charitable donations and public appeals to be used for welfare purposes. This includes the payment of welfare pensions to Gurkhas who, in common with many other soldiers recruited to British colours for wartime service, were discharged before completing the requisite period of employment to qualify for a Service pension. The GWS provides, even in the most remote areas of Nepal, primary health care, first aid and emergency treatment, doctors' clinics and elementary dentistry, all free of charge. It is also involved in community projects and the

award of one-off hardship payments in respect of individual catastrophes. No genuine case of hardship is ever turned away and its work not only benefits our ex-Servicemen, but is also of value to the infrastructure of Nepal as a whole.

L104A1 Anti-riot Gun

Mr. McNamara: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the means are of assessing a candidate applying for a competency qualification to fire the L104A1 anti-riot gun; what the minimum number of rounds is a candidate must fire to complete the training course; how many rounds must be fired in test conditions; what the pass score is; what the percentage rate of successful candidates is; and how many hours' training is required before a candidate is ready to take the test. [80625]

Mr. Ingram: All soldiers are, by virtue of their training and experience, considered capable of being trained as a baton gunner. Individuals do not apply to take the L104A1 competency qualification, rather, assessments are made by commanders who then choose who should be trained as a baton gunner. To complete the L21 training course, a minimum of 20 rounds must be fired of which five rounds must be fired under test conditions achieving a grouping of 200mm. There is no score pass or percentage pass rate as such, as training is continued until the standard has been achieved. In addition to the basics of small arms training, it takes a further five hours to train a soldier to safely handle and fire a baton gun.

Medical Down-Grading

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many members of Her Majesty's forces are medically down-graded, [80794]

Dr. Moonie: The numbers of trained UK regular personnel in the armed forces who were medically down-graded in October 2002 are given in the following table:

	Officers	*Other ranks*	*Total*
Navy	221	2,467	2,688
Army	908	9,694	10,602
RAF	536	3,297	3,833

Notes:

1. These figures exclude FTRS, Gurkhas, R Irish (Home Service) and reservists who have been mobilised for duty.
2. The Army figures are based on the Pulheems Efficiency Standard, and are all those who are not marked as being fit everywhere.
3. The RAF figures are based on the Medical Employment Standard, and are all those who have a 3, 4 or 5 against their ground work capability.
4. The Navy figures are based on their Medical Category and are all those who do not have a P code of P2.
5. As the services have different methods of determining who is medically down-graded the figures are not comparable across the three services.

MOD Properties

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will make a statement on the implications for other parts of his Department's estate in London of the proposed development announced by his Department on 29 October of its three sites at Northolt, Woolwich and Uxbridge. [82059]

Dr. Moonie: At the Public Launch of Project "MoD Estate London" (MoDEL) on 29 October, I announced that the Ministry of Defence, in consultation with the US Visiting Forces (USVF), are proposing to vacate 11 sites within, or close to, Greater London.

The proposed sites are:

Sites occupied by MOD

Inglis Barracks, Mill Hill
RAF Bentley Priory
Royal Military Academy Woolwich
Victoria House Woolwich
Ha Ha Road Woolwich

Sites Occupied by the USVF

RAF Daws Hill
RAF Eastcote
RAF West Ruislip
Blenheim Crescent
Loudwater
Edison House

Additionally, the sites the MOD is proposing to retain and develop as Core Sites are RAF Northolt and Royal Artillery Barracks, Woolwich. Further, it has been proposed that RAF Uxbridge could be developed as a Core Site for the United States Visiting Forces (USVF). If the USVF do not participate in the project then the MOD would still vacate RAF Uxbridge.

Nuclear Test Veterans

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many representations on compensation he has received from nuclear test veterans since June 2001; and if he will make a statement. [80125]

Dr. Moonie: The Ministry of Defence has received seven representations in the form of letters from nuclear test veterans concerning compensation since 1 June 2001. The Veterans Agency has received 37 new applications for War Pensions associated with participation in nuclear tests since 1 June 2001.

The Ministry of Defence has every confidence in the independent studies carried out by the National Radiological Protection Board and the Imperial Cancer Research Fund which showed that for the veterans as a group their participation in the nuclear test programme has not had a detectable effect on their expectation of life, or on their risk of developing cancer or other fatal diseases.

Operation Sandcastle

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will break down the expenditure on Operation Sandcastle under headings. [81325]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 18 November 2002]:* According to records held by the Ministry of Defence we estimate that costs of Operation Sandcastle, at 1991–92 prices, were as follows.

	£
Labour costs (civilian and military)	140,005.52
Information Technology Equipment (Equipment and Support Costs)	139,872.88
Travel and Subsistence Costs (includes car hire, mileage allowance and miscellaneous expenses)	85,060.51

Ann Clwyd: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many staff worked on Operation Sandcastle; what their grades were, and for how long each member of staff worked. [81328]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 18 November 2002]:* According to records held by the Ministry of Defence the number of days worked by investigator by rank (based on an eight hour day) on Operation Sandcastle were as follows:

	Days
Lieutenant Colonel	46.92
Major	7.33
Captain	179.63
Warrant Officer Class 1	177.53
Warrant Officer Class 2	170.66
Staff Sergeant	815.39
Sergeant	984.43
Corporal	748.58
Lance Corporal	187.74
Private	83.60

Those records also indicate that civilian staff worked for 19.22 hours in support of the operation.

Perisher Submarine

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Perisher submarine training exercises have taken place in each of the past five years. [82214]

Mr. Ingram: The number of Perisher submarine training courses which have taken place in each of the past five years is as follows:

Year	*Courses*
1997	2
1998	2
1999	2
2000	1
2001	1
2002	2

Picket Lines

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence under what circumstances members of the armed forces can cross trade union picket lines. [82155]

Mr. Ingram: Access to property or equipment beyond trade union picket lines is a civil matter and would consequently be an issue for the civil authorities, not the military. No circumstances are envisaged where the armed forces would be called upon to cross picket lines.

Recruitment (Over-50s)

Mr. MacDougall: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many people employed in his Department are aged over 50. [81688]

Dr. Moonie: The available information is given in the table, showing the position as at September 2002.

	50 and Under	*Over 50*	*Percentage over 50*
Ministry of Defence	51,154	25,805	33.5
Trading Funds	9,079	2,981	24.7
Total	60,233	28,786	32.3

Source:
SA Civilian

Reservists

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has to ensure that embodied regular reservists are given the same promotion opportunities as their regular army counterparts. [80697]

Dr. Moonie: On permanent service, Reserve officers and soldiers are subject to the normal rules for promotion applicable to Active List officers and regular soldiers at that time. If when called out on permanent service a Reservist receives substantive promotion to a higher rank, they will retain that higher rank when released from permanent service.

For training or when employed on Full Time Reserve Service a Reservist may, according to the current rules for Active List officers and regular soldiers, be granted acting rank appropriate to any appointment which they are required to fill while so called out.

Royal Hospital, Haslar

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions his Department has had with the Borough of Gosport as planning authority about the long-term use of the site of the Royal hospital Haslar. [80798]

Dr. Moonie: Ministry of Defence's plans to withdraw from the Royal hospital Haslar site, following the 1998 decision, are tied to the Portsmouth Hospitals NHS Trust's development of its Queen Alexandra hospital site at Cosham. It would be premature for the MOD to enter into formal discussions with Gosport borough council until the timescale for the completion of that development is more definite, but informal discussions take place periodically with the Leader of the Council to apprise him of progress, and MOD officials met Council officers on one occasion in 1999 prior to a review of MOD estates in the Gosport and Portsmouth area and after the decision to close Haslar as a MOD site had been taken. At that stage, the local authority—which will ultimately be responsible for determining the future of the site— was reviewing its plans for the local area.

Royal Navy

Mr. Cox: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the strength of the Royal Navy is. [82735]

Dr. Moonie: The strength of the Royal Navy is announced in Defence Analytical Services Agency TSP4, "Strength of the UK armed forces quarterly press release as at 1 October 2002" which is published today. As of 1 October 2002 the total strength of the Naval Service—full time trained and untrained personnel—was 42,330.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Royal Navy ships are *(a)* on operations and *(b)* in port. [81011]

Mr. Ingram: As at 18 November there were 77 Royal Navy ships and submarines in the operational Fleet. This includes all vessels which are operational or engaged in preparing for service, trials or training. As at 18 November, 21 Royal Navy ships and submarines were undergoing deep maintenance.

Secondments

Mr. Simon Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will list the senior officials who have left his Department since April 2000 to take up posts in the private sector, stating in each case the name, position previously held, date of leaving, and the company and position taken up. [82387]

Dr. Moonie: Under the Cabinet Office rules on the acceptance of outside appointments by Crown servants ("the Business Appointment Rules"), all Ministry of Defence non-industrial civilians and officers in the Armed Forces are required, within two years of leaving the Department, to apply for permission before taking up employment with an organisation connected with their official duties. Some of these applications are speculative and not all lead to external appointments being taken up. The rules require only senior officials whose applications are approved by the Prime Minister to confirm to their former department that they have taken up a new appointment on leaving the MOD. Details of such appointments are published in the annual reports of the Advisory Committee on Business Appointments, copies of which are available in the Library.

Service Establishments

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many times establishment targets for the *(a)* Army, *(b)* Navy and *(c)* RAF have changed since 1998; and what the rationale was for the change each time. [81109]

Mr. Ingram *[holding answer 19 November 2002]:* The full time trained requirement for the Armed Forces is published quarterly by the Defence Analytical Services Agency.

In each Service, however, the requirement for trained manpower is a live and dynamic figure which can change frequently. Causes for such changes include alterations to force structures, evolving doctrine, the introduction of new equipment and technology, changes to the operating environment and the introduction of routine efficiencies. Consequently establishment target figures have been revised many times before and since 1998.

In the Royal Navy to provide a degree of smoothing for planning purposes, a Headmark Requirement for future years is calculated quarterly (issued three times per annum prior to 2001).

The Army now reviews its future manpower requirement annually.

The RAF, for strategic manpower planning purposes, normally captures forecast establishments twice a year.

Spending Review

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what capabilities or facilities he intends to procure with the new capital announced in the Spending Review; and if he will list the five capabilities that he intends to spend the most money on. [80968]

Mr. Ingram: The 2002 Spending Review provided £1 billion for extra investment in enhanced military capabilities to implement the conclusions of the New Chapter to the Strategic Defence Review. The allocation of this will be determined through the Ministry of Defence's annual planning process which will be completed early next year and will inform the Defence White Paper which it is planned to publish next summer.

My right hon. Friend The Secretary of State for Defence has announced that we will be investing in a range of capabilities including by accelerating the Watchkeeper UAV programme and upgrading our E-3D AWACS aircraft. We are evaluating additional enhancements to our target acquisition and strike capabilities to operate 24 hours a day, in all weathers, and to enable rapid retargeting. We are also acquiring technology to meet the threats from chemical, biological, radiological and nuclear weapons that we may face in the future.

Stores Management System

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what progress has been made in developing the defence stores management system; and how much has been spent on the project to date. [80966]

Mr. Ingram: The original objectives of the Defence Stores Management Solution (DSMS) were to manage the single service inventories as a single defence inventory, to build a single system to replace the existing Royal Navy, Army and Royal Air Force systems, and to provide a deployed inventory management capability. The project had not secured full main gate approval by the time that the project was suspended on grounds of affordability at the time. The requirement, including the continuing need for a deployed inventory management capability, will be addressed as part of a wider end-to-end review of the logistic process, involving the DLO, front-line commands and industry which should complete by mid 2003. Expenditure on DSMS to date totals £140 million and estimated net savings of £650 million over a 10 year period were anticipated from its implementation.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Affordable Housing

Linda Perham: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what assessment he has made of the efficacy of the definition of affordable housing; and what plans he has to alter that definition. [80528]

Mr. McNulty: There are no formal definitions of affordable housing within housing policy. For the purposes of securing affordable housing through the planning system, affordable housing encompasses low-cost market and subsidised housing (irrespective of tenure, ownership—whether exclusive or shared—or financial arrangements) that will be available to people who cannot afford to rent or buy houses generally available on the open market. Local authorities are expected to define through their local plans what they consider to be affordable in the plan area in terms of the relationship between local income levels and house prices or rents for different types of households.

The research report, "Delivering Affordable Housing through Planning Policy", published by DTLR in February 2002, noted that local authorities were not consistent in defining affordable housing, with a tendency in the south to equate affordable housing with social rented housing, and not to consider the full range of alternatives. The report concluded that local authorities should ensure their consideration of affordable housing, including the wider definition given to it by national planning guidance. There are no plans to make the definition less flexible.

Affordable Housing (Chesham and Amersham)

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many units of affordable housing have been built in the Chesham and Amersham constituency in each of the last five years; and if he will make a statement. [81171]

Mr. McNulty: The Chesham and Amersham constituency is within Chiltern district council, which has reported the following levels of house-building activity by both registered social landlords and the authority itself:

New dwellings completed within Chiltern district council area by registered social landlords (RSLs):

Year	*Number*
1997–98	4
1998–99	0
1999–2000	0
2000–01	31
2001–02	55

Note:
No completions of dwellings by the local authority itself were reported.
Source:
Data to 2000–01: LA and RSL new-build from ODPM P2 (monthly) housing activity returns.

Compulsory Purchase

Mr. Edward Davey: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister which *(a)* Government agencies and *(b)* regional bodies have compulsory purchase powers. [81696]

Mr. McNulty: The following list sets out the principal Government agencies and regional bodies which operate in England and which have their own compulsory purchase powers. In addition some Ministers have compulsory purchase powers which they exercise through departmental agencies: for example, orders for trunk roads are made by the Highways Agency on behalf of the Secretary of State for Transport.

Government agencies

Housing Corporation
Housing Action Trusts
Environment Agency
NHS organisations
Countryside Agency
English Nature
Civil Aviation Authority
UK Atomic Energy Authority
Coal Authority
British Waterways Board
The Broads Authority
Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission for England (English Heritage)
Urban Regeneration Agency (English Partnerships)

Regional bodies

Regional Development Agencies

Council Rents (Greater London)

Mr. Cox: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what the average increase in council rents in the Greater London area has been in each of the last three years. [81671]

Mr. McNulty: Average council rents in Greater London for the past few years are as shown in the table. The annual change in the average council rents is also provided in the table

Financial year	*Average weekly rent £*	*Change in weekly rent £*	*Percentage change in weekly rent*
1998–99	55.27		
1999–2000	58.00	+2.73	+4.9
2000–01	60.44	+2.44	+4.2
2001–02	62.36	+1.92	+3.2
2002–03 (provisional)	64.29	+1.93	+3.1

Hare Krishna Temple (Hertfordshire)

Keith Vaz: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what representations he has received from the Hare Krishna Temple at Letchmore Heath, Hertfordshire concerning their application for planning permission to extend the temple. [82358]

Mr. McNulty: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has received no representations about this planning application.

Housing Policy

Ms Oona King: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what proportion of Government funds allocated for housing is specified for the sound proofing of ageing

council and housing association properties; and what proportion of this money will be allocated to the Housing Corporation for use by registered social landlords. [80587]

Mr. McNulty: Although we have not allocated funds specifically for sound proofing of ageing council or housing association properties, we have set a target requiring social landlords to bring their housing up to the decent home standard, one component of which is adequate insulation against external noise.

Local authorities can meet this target either through their own resources and through the Major Repairs Allowance and Single Capital Pot; or by setting up a high performance Arms Length Housing Management Organisation (ALMO); or through a Private Finance Initiative (PFI) scheme; or by transferring their stock to one or more housing associations.

Repairs to housing association stock to bring it up to the decent home standard may be funded through the Housing Corporation's approved development programme.

Thames Gateway Initiative

Bob Russell: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister what recognition the Government give to the Thames Gateway initiative; and what financial and other support the Government provide. [80754]

Mr. McNulty: My right hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister made a statement in July announcing plans for a step change in our policies for building successful, thriving communities. As part of that statement, the Thames Gateway was identified as a key area for economic and housing growth. My right hon. Friend, Lord Rooker, chairs the Thames Gateway Strategic Partnership, whose membership includes Ministers from five Government Departments. The partnership is now looking at new means of delivering the rapid regeneration and development of the Gateway.

There are no dedicated resources for the Thames Gateway, but development and regeneration is being supported by investment from various Government funding streams (for example, housing and transport). My right. hon. Friend the Deputy Prime Minister will be announcing around the turn of the year how he will be allocating resources identified for the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister in the Spending Review 2002.

Urban White Paper

Andrew George: To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many funding commitments have been launched by his Department and across the Government following the publication of the Urban White Paper in November 2000; which *(a)* require bidding and *(b)* are linked to a set funding formula; and what the total amount available for each commitment is. [81570]

Mr. Raynsford: The Office of the Deputy Prime Minister has one funding commitment which flows directly from the Urban White Paper and which meets both criteria of requiring bidding and of being linked to a set funding formula.

The future rough sleeping strategy was included in the wider programme set out in "More than a Roof" (March 2002) with a total budget of £125 million in 2002–03. £10 million of this has been allocated to local authorities by "formula" and the rest is subject to a "bidding" process. Some goes direct to voluntary sector organisations funding existing or new services, agreed as part of a local strategy.

In the time available it has not been possible to provide information in the form requested on funding commitments launched by other Government Departments, but I will write shortly to the hon. Member.

CULTURE, MEDIA, SPORT

Athletics Funding

Mr. Nick Hawkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport pursuant to the oral answer by the Minister of Sport on 18 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 350–51 whether every sporting governing body which received funding before the Sydney Olympics and the Manchester Commonwealth Games will receive the same funding, adjusted for inflation, in *(a)* 2002–03, *(b)* 2003–04, *(c)* 2004–05 and *(d)* 2005–06; and if she will make a statement. [82115]

Mr. Caborn: The Government has committed to maintain funding for UK Sport's World Class Performance Programme (the programme that supports our Olympic athletes) at the same level in the run up to the Athens Olympics as it was in the run up to the Sydney Olympics. The level of funding provided to individual governing bodies of sport, however, is determined by the individual Sports Councils and no guarantees of funding are provided.

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport pursuant to her oral answer of 18 November 2002, *Official Report*, column 350–51 to the hon. Members for Surrey Heath (Mr. Hawkins) and Ryedale, whether the commitment to maintain world performance funding applies to *(a)* those athletes who were in receipt of funding before the Sydney Olympics, and *(b)* athletes who will take part in the Athens and Beijing Olympics. [82281]

Mr. Caborn: The Government has committed to maintain funding for UK Sport's World Class Performance Programme (the programme that supports our Olympic athletes) at the same level in the run up to the Athens Olympics as it was in the run up to the Sydney Olympics. This commitment was to support the Programme, overall, and not to individual athletes. Decisions on individual athletes who receive funding will continue to be determined by the governing bodies and performance directors in consultation with UK Sport.

BBC

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) what consultations took place before the decision was taken to lift the restriction

on the number of digital channels operated by BBC Worldwide through UKTV; and what the outcome was; [80430]

(2) what publicity was given to the decision to lift the restriction on the number of digital channels operated by BBC Worldwide through UKTV; [80437]

(3) when the restriction on the number of digital channels operated by BBC Worldwide through UKTV was lifted; and for what reason. [80426]

Dr. Howells: The restriction to the number of channels that UKTV can launch under the first and second joint ventures, which were approved in 1997, has not been lifted, but the third and fourth joint ventures, which were approved in 2000, are not subject to a restriction. As BBC commercial service approvals, the joint ventures were not subject to consultation, nor were they publicised.

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will list the digital channels operated by BBC Worldwide, through UKTV, which have been given approval by her Department. [80427]

Dr. Howells: BBC Worldwide's joint ventures with Flextech have been subject to my right hon. Friend's approval, but the commercial channels launched by UKTV under the terms of those joint ventures are not.

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what steps she has taken to ensure that digital channels operated by BBC Worldwide through UKTV do not unfairly compete with existing commercial channels. [80428]

Dr. Howells: It is a condition of the joint ventures under which UKTV channels operate that they must abide fully by the BBC's fair trading commitment, the commercial policy guidelines and all the requirements of EU and UK competition law. They are also subject to external audit by independent fair trading auditors and to the UK and EU competition authorities.

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what measures she has taken to ensure that the BBC's programmes do not adversely affect existing commercial *(a)* radio and *(b)* television channels. [80432]

Dr. Howells: The BBC's licence fee funded services are distinct from the BBC's commercial services. The market impact of any new BBC licence fee funded service is one of the factors the Secretary of State must consider in her assessment of a proposal. This is not the case for BBC commercial services. However, BBC commercial services must comply with EU and UK competition law, as well as the BBC's Fair Trading Commitment and the Commercial Policy Guidelines.

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what her policy is on the future financing of the BBC. [80433]

Dr. Howells: I have no plans to change the current financing arrangements for the BBC, but funding will be looked at as part of the process of reviewing the BBC's Charter, which expires in 2006.

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport whether the relationship between BBC Worldwide and Flextech has been scrutinised by the BBC's external auditors. [80438]

Dr. Howells: Yes. The relationship between BBC Worldwide and Flextech is subject to scrutiny by the BBC's external auditors.

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) what measures she is taking to ensure that the BBC abides by the Fair Trading Commitment; [80439]

(2) whether OFCOM will have responsibility for ensuring that the BBC abides by its Fair Trading Commitment; and if she will make a statement. [80440]

Dr. Howells: The BBC's Fair Trading Commitment is an internal compliance document and, therefore, will continue to be regulated by the BBC Board of Governors. OFCOM will have concurrent powers (with OFT) to apply competition law to broadcasting and related activities. This applies to the BBC, as to other broadcasting organisations.

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will place in the Library a copy of the documents issued in November 2000 that gave permission for the BBC to extend its range of new channels with Telewest under the UKTV joint venture. [81827]

Dr. Howells: Approvals given for BBC Worldwide's commercial activities contain commercially sensitive information and therefore cannot be placed in the Library. The restriction to the number of channels that UKTV can launch under the first and second joint ventures, which were approved in 1997, has not been lifted but the third and fourth joint ventures, which were approved in 2000, are not subject to a restriction.

Bletchley Park

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans she has for the future of the Code Breaker Museum at Bletchley Park. [81823]

Dr. Howells: My Department has no plans. Bletchley Park and its contents are the responsibility of the Bletchley Park Trust, which is implementing plans that will ensure the long-term preservation of key heritage elements of the site and serve as a fitting memorial to the men and women involved in the vital code-breaking work there during the second world war.

Elite Sport Funding

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what the funding for elite sportsmen and sportswomen will be in cash terms under her three-year future funding plans in *(a)* 2002–03, *(b)* 2003–04, *(c)* 2004–05 and *(d)* 2005–06; and if she will make a statement. [82116]

Mr. Caborn: The data required is not readily available. I will write to the hon Member with detailed information as soon as possible.

History Channel

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she has satisfied herself that UK History is distinctive from the History channel and will not compete unfairly with it. [80429]

Dr. Howells: Unlike the BBC's licence fee funded channels, there is no requirement that BBC Worldwide's commercial channels are distinctive. As a commercial channel, UK History can compete on a commercial basis in the same way as any channel, subject to all the requirements of EU and UK Competition Law, as well as the BBC's Fair Trading Commitment and Commercial Policy Guidelines.

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if she will publish the approval given in 2000 to UKTV for the UK History channel. [80436]

Dr. Howells: No. Approvals given for BBC Worldwide's commercial activities contain commercially sensitive information and, therefore, are not published.

Independent Production Quotas

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) when the independent production quotas for television will apply across all media including the internet; and when the independent production quota of 25 per cent. will be increased to 40 per cent. across all media. [80726]

(2) what plans there are to increase the independent production quota for broadcasting from 25 per cent. to 40 per cent.; and what plans there are to extend the 25 per cent. independent production quota in *(a)* radio and *(b)* web sites. [81824]

Dr. Howells: The ITC are considering the independent productions quota as part of their review of the television programme supply market. We will consider any recommendations the review makes in this area. It is not our intention to apply the independent producers quota to web sites. We have received representations suggesting that BBC radio commits itself to an independent production quota similar to the one which currently exists for television services. The Department's officials are considering this issue with the BBC and others.

Millennium Stadium

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what recent assessment she has made of the continuing viability of the Millennium Stadium in Cardiff. [82109]

Mr. Caborn: No assessment has been made by this Department. Any ongoing liability of the Millennium Stadium is a matter for its operators and falls within the remit of the National Assembly for Wales.

Museum of Moving Image

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what plans there are to *(a)* reopen the Museum of Moving Image; and *(b)* open a new Museum of Film and Television in London. [81825]

Dr. Howells: The British Film Institute (BFI), which is responsible for the Museum of the Moving Image (MOMI), has no plans to re-open it. However, the BFI is developing plans to open a new Film Centre on the South Bank which will incorporate not only the collections of MOMI, but also the existing National Film Theatre, National Film and Television library and the BFI's head office.

School Playing Fields

Mr. Greenway: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many planning applications affecting school playing fields were *(a)* referred to Sport England and *(b)* objected to by Sport England in *(i)* 1999–2000, (ii) 2000–01 and (iii) 2001–02. [82364]

Mr. Caborn: Sport England in their role as statutory consultee for planning applications affecting playing fields received 314 applications in respect of playing fields within educational ownership for the year 1999—2000, 428 for the year 2000—01, and 551 for the year 2001—02. Data is not available to show Sport England's response action to planning applications for playing fields in educational ownership.

Planning applications affecting playing fields can often involve a change of use that benefits sport rather than in resulting in the outright sale of playing fields or their development It should also be noted that where planning permission is granted this does not necessarily mean that the proposed development or change of use went ahead. Data is not collected centrally on whether planning applications are actually implemented.

Seconded Civil Servants

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what work has been *(a)* researched and *(b)* implemented jointly by her Department and *(i)* the Broadcasting Standards Commission and (ii) London Arts through the use of seconded senior civil servants. [81568]

Dr. Howells: No work has been researched and jointly implemented by my Department and the Broadcasting Standards Commission or London Arts through the use of seconded senior civil servants. Neither organisation conducts research.

TV Licences

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many people were given custodial sentences following a failure to pay a fine for TV licence evasion in each of the last 20 years. [80442]

Dr. Howells: The information requested is available only from 1992 onwards. The number of people in England and Wales received into prison for non-payment of fines for television licence fee evasion, in each year since 1992, was as follows.

Year	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001
Number	570	861	770	774	355	245	156	83	36	31

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport whether a television licence is required for a personal computer capable of receiving television broadcasts. [80488]

Dr. Howells: The BBC has statutory responsibility for the administration of the television licensing system and for determining the licensing requirements in specific circumstances. I cannot, therefore, comment in detail on how those requirements would apply in particular cases. However, the requirement to have a licence relates to the installation or use (actual or intended) of the apparatus in question and not simply its capability. A television licence is required for the installation or use of a television receiver. A television receiver is equipment installed or used for the purpose of receiving television programme services, as defined by section 2(4) of the Broadcasting Act 1990. A personal computer which is capable of receiving television programme services, and which is installed or used for such purposes, is therefore a television receiver, and its installation or use as such requires a television licence.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

Israel

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with the United States Government about the use of US manufactured military equipment containing components manufactured in the UK and sold to Israel; and if he will make a statement. [82226]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The Foreign Secretary's reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Sherwood (Mr. Paddy Tipping) of 8 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 650–2W, informed Parliament about the issuing of export licences for the export of Head Up Display Units (HUDs) to the USA for incorporation into F-16s, some of which were for re-export to Israel. While considering these applications we had discussions with US Administration to make sure of our understanding of US export control policy and practice. The US Government maintains a strong and effective export licensing system.

Kenya

Tony Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what arrangements are being made by *(a)* the UK Government, *(b)* the Commonwealth and *(c)* the European Union to provide observers for the Kenyan elections on 27th December. [80543]

Mr. Rammell: The Government of Kenya has invited international observers. The European Union Election Observer Mission will be the cornerstone of the international observation effort. It will deploy 20 long term observers from 24 November and 50 short term observers a week before polling. The UK has nominated a list of nationals willing to participate in the Mission.

The Commonwealth Secretariat has been invited to send a team of observers as well. A team of Commonwealth officials has been in Kenya making a needs assessment.

Rwanda

Mr. Ivan Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his assessment is of the situation in *(a)* Rwanda and *(b)* the Great Lakes region. [80888]

Mr. Rammell: a) Since the genocide and civil war in 1994, the Rwandan Government and people have been rebuilding their country and lives. The Government has embarked on a programme of recovery through national reconciliation and poverty reduction. It has made significant progress but continues to face many challenges, including the delivery of a tradition-based judicial process (gacaca), the demobilisation and reintegration of ex-combatants, and democratisation.

b) The situation in the Great Lakes is dominated by the conflicts in DRC and Burundi. In the DRC the 30 July Pretoria Agreement was a welcome development, resulting in the withdrawal of all Rwandan forces by 5 October. The Government of DRC must now honour its Pretoria commitments to deal with the anti-Rwandan militia operating in DRC, and reach agreement with the rebel groups (MLC and RCD-Goma) on a transitional Government.talks resumed on 15 November. It is hoped this will end the conflict conclusively and result in the withdrawal of the remaining Zimbabwean and Uganda forces soon.

In Burundi recent talks produced a ceasefire between the Government of Burundi and some, but not all, of the rebels. We are giving our full support to South African and Tanzanian mediation efforts, which are seeking a comprehensive agreement. Uganda's President Museveni is convening a regional summit soon.

UK Ambassador (Washington)

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when Sir David Manning will take up his position as the new UK ambassador to Washington; and when Sir Christopher Meyer is due to retire. [82113]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Sir David Manning will take up his position as British Ambassador to Washington in summer 2003. Sir Christopher Meyer will retire at the end of February 2003.

HEALTH

Child Care

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proposals he has to improve the interdependence and effectiveness of advocacy and support services for children in residential care and their preparation for independent living when they leave residential care. [80471]

Jacqui Smith: The Children (Leaving Care) Act commenced in October 2001. This imposed a duty on local authorities to provide a personal adviser to each young person leaving care from their 16th birthday. This adviser must work with the young person to draw up a "pathway plan" setting out the support that they must have to prepare them for independent living. Part of the adviser's role will be to represent the views of young people and to advocate on their behalf with the agencies whose services will be necessary to prepare them for adulthood. Guidance to the Act also requires local authorities to make provision so that young people may have access to independent advocacy if they need to complain about how services have been provided for them.

The Adoption and Children Act 2002, when commenced, will place a new duty on local authorities to make arrangements for the provision of advocacy for looked after children.

Arthritis

Mr. Ivan Henderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to help sufferers of arthritis. [80890]

Jacqui Smith: The national service framework for older people does not specifically focus on arthritis but through improvements in general hospital care, and especially through the new single assessment process, older people's health care needs will be properly targeted, so ensuring that the services that are provided are most appropriate to their needs.

People with arthritis will benefit from the expert patients programme, which will see the national health service provide training in self-management skills for people with long-term chronic conditions. The first pilot phase has begun in selected primary care trust sites, with activity to take place both on a generic and a disease-specific basis.

The Medical Research Council, which is the main Government research agency, funded major research projects into arthritis. Also, in the past year, two new classes of drugs, Cox II inhibitors and anti-TNF therapy, have been made available to arthritis patients, following reviews by the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE). In addition, NICE is reviewing the drug Anakinra for its clinical and cost effectiveness in treating rheumatoid arthritis.

Bed Occupancy (Buckinghamshire)

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what the average bed occupancy rate was at NHS units in Chesham and Amersham in each of the last six years since 1 May 1996; [81200]

(2) if he will make a statement on progress on cancelled operations and appointments at NHS units in the Chesham and Amersham constituency in the last 12 months; [81194]

(3) how many acute beds there were in *(a)* Chesham and Amersham and *(b)* Buckinghamshire in each year since 1 January 1996; and how many he expects there to be in the next 12 months. [81198]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 19 November2002]:* Information is not collected centrally, or by Thames Valley health authority, at constituency level. Information on bed numbers and occupancy together with details of cancelled operations for the three Buckinghamshire acute trusts has been placed in the Library.

On the progress made on cancelled operations and appointments, I am advised by Thames Valley Strategic health authority that the acute trust providing care for Chesham and Amersham constituents, South Buckinghamshire national health service trust, has performed well. In terms of cancelled operations, information for Quarter 1 of 2002–03 shows no last minute cancellations for non-clinical reasons.

Cardiology

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the estimated cost to date is of the introduction of the Cardiology NUF; and what estimates have been made of future cost implications. [80953]

Ms Blears: The national service framework for coronary heart disease is a programme for improving services for the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of the disease.

The Department does not collect figures on the cost of national health service services, which enables an accurate global figure for the cost of tackling a particular disease to be calculated. The great majority of spending on services for coronary heart disease is contained within primary care trust unified allocations. It is for primary care trusts, in partnership with NHS trusts and other local stakeholders, to determine how best to use their funds to meet national and local priorities for improving health, tackling health inequalities and modernising services.

Dentists

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what percentage of the population in the Fareham and Gosport Primary Care Trust area is registered with dentists in the national health service; [80802]

(2) what dental facilities are available within the national health service in the Gosport area; [80800]

(3) how many patients can be given dental care at the national health service treatment centre in Fareham; [80803]

(4) how many dentists are accepting new adult patients within the national health service in the Borough of Gosport. [80801]

Ms Blears: Approximately 40 per cent. of the population in the Fareham and Gosport Primary Care Trust (PCT) area were registered with a general dental service (GDS) dentist at 30 September 2002. This percentage will exclude patients who have not been to their GDS dentists within the past 15 months, as registrations last for 15 months after the end of the month of attendance, and patients who receive dental treatment from other national health service dental services.

Hampshire and Isle of Wight Strategic Health Authority has advised me that NHS services available within the borough of Gosport include:

Nine practices, with a total of 20 dentists.

Two surgeries (Rowner and Gosport), with three dentists working between them, serving people with special needs, including those patients needing mental health services, and children with high caries (high decay).

Community facilities.

It is not possible to quantify the annual activity of the Fareham NHS Treatment Centre. However, the treatment centre can treat 40 patients per day. The centre does not deal with routine dental treatment. Patients attend the centre for emergency treatment or, if they are in the process of having a course of treatments, they would attend the centre specifically for that treatment.

The Strategic Health Authority has advised me that currently no NHS dentists within Gosport are accepting new adult patients. Patients wishing to register with a CDS dentist can obtain details of dentists accepting new patients by contacting NHS Direct.

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how the payment to dentists under the national health service relates to the time involved and costs incurred by the dentist. [80730]

Mr. Lammy: Dentists' fees are set out in the Statement of Dental Remuneration (SDR) which was set in consultation with the profession. The SDR was designed to deliver, after expenses, a target annual net income (TANI) for dental practitioners with an average commitment to the national health service. The TANI was reviewed annually by the Doctors' and Dentists' Review Body on Remuneration (DDRB) who made recommendations on any increase as appropriate.

Since 1994, based on evidence submitted by the Government and the profession including evidence submitted jointly on practice expenses, the DDRB have made pay recommendations based on percentage increases to the gross fees to cover both income and expenses rather than setting a TANI. Since 1999 the Government have accepted the Review Body's recommendations without staging. The current average net income of dental practitioners is considered to be in line with comparable professions.

Discussions with representatives of the dental profession take place regularly, where joint work is undertaken to review any particular fee items that appear to have fallen out of line with current practices.

Fertility Rates

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether his Department makes a regular assessment of the fertility rate of young males. [81050]

Ms Blears: The Department does not make a regular assessment of the fertility rate of young males.

The Department of Health, with the Department of the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the Health and Safety Executive and the European Chemical Industry Council, is funding a programme of four epidemiological studies to investigate trends in male reproductive health, and the possible influences of occupational, environmental or other exposure to chemicals. Two of these studies will provide extensive information on semen quality in men in the United Kingdom. We expect the programme of studies to be completed by the end of this year and the results of the research will be published in due course.

Health Professions Council

Vernon Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what representations he has received about the proposed fee increases for the Health Professions Council; and if he will make a statement. [82106]

Mr. Hutton: We have received a number of items of correspondence from hon. and right hon. Members concerning the Health Professions' Council's proposed fee level.

The principle of United Kingdom healthcare regulation is based on the concept of independent self-regulation and it is for the HPC to determine the appropriate fee to be charged for registration taking account of the functions it is required to undertake and the views of those consulted. When considering whether to approve the proposed fees, the Privy Council will take account of these relevant issues.

HFEA Report

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the annual report of the HFEA for 2002 will be published. [80693]

Ms Blears: The Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority intends to publish its 2002 annual report in early December.

IVF/DI Data

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the IVF/DI data for 2002 will be available. [80694]

Ms Blears: The Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority is considering the content and date of publication of the data as part of its overall business plan for 2003–04.

Junior Doctors

Mr. Lyons: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average hours of junior doctors were in 1997; and what they were at the latest date for which figures are available. [80143]

Mr. Hutton: Data on junior doctors' working hours is not collected in a way that enables an average to be calculated. Available data shows the proportion of junior doctors who work above or below set thresholds.

Initial indications from monitoring carried out in September 2002 showed 86 per cent. working on average less than 56 hours a week, with at least 23 per cent, of these working less than 48 hours a week.

This compares favourably with the monitoring carried out in March 1997 which indicated that only 78 per cent. of junior doctors were working on average less than 56 hours a week.

Mental Health

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what consultation his Department undertook before publishing the draft Mental Health Bill. [82703]

Jacqui Smith: The proposals in the draft Mental Health Bill have been the subject of a long process of consultation by the Government, starting with the Green Paper "Reform of the Mental Health Act 1983" published in November 1999. Since then there have been informal discussions with key stakeholders and letters have been received, for example following the publication of the White Paper "Reforming the Mental Health Act" published in December 2000.

Dr. Gibson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he has assessed the work of the Mental Health Institute. [81506]

Jacqui Smith: Although the National Institute for Mental Health in England (NIMHE) is only in the first year of its establishment, there are plans in place and funds set aside to commission an evaluation of NIMHE's activities, in collaboration with the research & development Directorate at the Department. It is anticipated that the work will be commissioned in 2003.

Mid-Essex Hospital Trust

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people are waiting for in-patient treatment in the mid Essex hospital services national health service area. [82061]

Mr. Lammy: There were 9,703 patients waiting for in-patient treatment at Mid Essex Hospital Services national health service trust at the end of September 2002.

Source: KH07 return.

NHS Administration (Buckinghamshire)

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many staff were employed to carry out the administration for NHS services for residents of *(a)* Chesham and Amersham and *(b)* Buckinghamshire in 1997; how many are employed now; and if he will make a statement; [81197]

(2) what the total running costs of NHS organisations serving *(a)* Chesham and Amersham and *(b)* Buckinghamshire were in 1997; what the totals are now; and if he will make a statement. [81196]

Ms Blears *[holding answer 19 November 2002]:* Information is not collected centrally, or by Thames Valley Strategic Health Authority, at constituency level.

Information available centrally on the number of administrative staff in the former Buckinghamshire health authority area is shown in the table. 2001 is the most recent year for which information is currently available.

NHS hospital and community health services (HCHS) and general and personal medical services: Administrative staff within the Buckinghamshire health authority area as at 30 September each year

Whole time equivalents	*1997*	*2001*
All administrative staff	2,120	2,560
Health and community health services	1,560	1,880
General and personal medical services	560	690

Notes:
Figures are rounded to the nearest 10.
Due to rounding totals may not equal the sum of component parts.
Sources:
Department of Health non-medical workforce census.
Department of Health general and personal medical services statistics.

A direct comparison of running costs for NHS organisations within the former Buckinghamshire health authority area, between 1997 and now, is not possible because of the considerable organisational change that has taken place in the intervening years.

Allocations to the Buckinghamshire Health Authority in 1997–98 were £265,389,000 and in 2002–03, £493,959,000.

NHS Bank

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the progress made in establishing the NHS Bank; and how much money it has lent. [82282]

Mr. Milburn: The NHS Bank has been operating in 'shadow' form this year overseen by the Department's director of finance and investment and four strategic health authority chief executives. The future management arrangements are still under consideration.

The shadow NHS Bank has made available a total of 100 million to three strategic health authority areas. Avon, Gloucestershire & Wiltshire, 45 million, Surrey and Sussex, 30 million, Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire, 25 million. The terms, conditions and amounts for individual health service bodies is still to be finalised by the strategic health authorities and are subject to delivery of agreed recovery plans.

North Cheshire Hospitals NHS Trust

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much North Cheshire Hospitals NHS Trust and its predecessor, Warrington Hospital NHS Trust, spent on public relations in each of the last five years. [82056]

Jacqui Smith: The table shows the public relations costs for North Cheshire Hospitals National Health Service Trust and its predecessor organisation in each of the last five years.

Year	Warrington hospital NHS trust £000	Halton hospital NHS trust £000	North Cheshire hospitals NHS trust £000
1998–99	21,580	In house	—
1999–00	22,010	In house	—
2000–01	24,344	17,076	—
2001–02	—	—	24,462
2002–03	—	—	29,100

Nursing and Residential Care Charges

Vernon Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to review the level of capital limits with respect to the cost of *(a)* nursing home care and *(b)* residential care. [82105]

Jacqui Smith: The Department is currently consulting on proposals to increase the capital limits used in the financial assessment for residential accommodation, including care homes providing nursing care, to 12,000 and 19,500 with effect from 7 April 2003.

Overseas Visitors Regulations

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what systems are in place to *(a)* identify and *(b)* collect payment from illegal immigrants and others who use the national health service and are subject to the charges to overseas visitors regulations 1989, as amended; [80955]

(2) if he will set out the total amount collected by the NHS under the NHS charges to overseas visitors regulations in each of the last three years for which records exist; and if he will make a statement. [80956]

Ms Blears: The National Health Service is first and foremost for the benefit of people who live in the United Kingdom. A person who is not ordinarily resident in the UK but who requires NHS hospital treatment is subject to the provisions of the National Health Service (Charges to Overseas Visitors) Regulations 1989, as amended [in 1991 (SI No: 438), 1994 (SI No: 1535), 2000 (SI No: 602), 2000 (SI No: 909)].

These regulations place a duty on NHS trusts to establish the residential status of all patients. Where an NHS trust identifies a person who is not ordinarily resident in the UK and is not otherwise exempt from charge then the regulations provide for the making and recovery of a charge by the trust for most types of hospital treatment.

The amounts collected from NHS charged patients are not separately identifiable in trust accounts and are not collected centrally.

Patient Prospectus Initiative

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures the Department in conjunction with the strategic health authorities are overseeing with regard to the delivery of the patient prospectus initiative. [80136]

Mr. Lammy: The Department is working closely with strategic health authorities' communication functions to maintain a progress overview of distribution. While it is for individual primary care trusts to organise local delivery arrangements, the Department is continuing to act in a facilitative role and to identify local support needs through StHAs.

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much his Department estimates has been spent by each primary care trust on the patient prospectus initiative. [80403]

Mr. Lammy: The responsibility for funding and compiling the prospectus leaflets was placed with primary care trusts (PCTs), who were encouraged to select the most appropriate and efficient local means of managing all aspects of prospectus production. The Department does not collect centrally the cost to each PCT of the patient prospectus initiative.

Physiotherapy/Chiropody

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the action he has taken to protect titles for physiotherapists and chiropodists. [81572]

Mr. Hutton: The Health Professions Order provides a register which will be divided into parts in respect of which there will be designated titles.

Under transitional arrangements a person who has not previously been registered may qualify for registration on the basis of safe and effective practice for a specified period or by satisfying the Health Professions Council (HPC) that additional experience and training give him the requisite standard of proficiency to be registered. To benefit from the transitional arrangements a person must apply within two years of the opening of the relevant part of the register. The HPC expect to open the new register in April 2003. Once the register is open no one can use the designated title lawfully unless he is registered or benefits from transitional arrangements.

Poultry

Mr. Roger Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Health, how many samples of poultry, by category, had a water content of *(a)* 0–10 per cent., *(b)* 11–20 per cent., *(c)* 21–30 per cent, *(d)* 31–40 per cent., and *(e)* 41 per cent. and more in each of the last 10 years. [81584]

Ms Blears: The Food Standards Agency has undertaken two surveys investigating added water in poultry and poultry products. The survey reported in October 2000, in the Food Survey Information Sheet 8/00, focused on added water in whole chicken and chicken parts, including half, quarter, boneless and skinless breast, thigh, drumstick and wing, sold mainly in the retail sector. The second survey reported in December 2001, in the Food Survey Information Sheet 20/01, investigated added water, chicken content and hydrolysed protein in frozen chicken breast products supplied to the catering trade. Copies of the two survey information sheets have been place in the Library.

The water content found in the poultry samples analysed in the two surveys is summarised in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1: Information Sheet No. 08/00 October 2000

Percentage water content of chicken	*Poultry category Number of samples found with added water (percentage of those sampled)* Whole chicken[1]	Boneless and skinless chicken breast[2]	Chicken thigh[3]
No added water	37 (49%)	72 (72%)	36 (88%)
0–10	25 (33%)	[4]16 (26%)	[5]5 (12%)
11–20	14 (18%)	4 (4%)	0
21–30	0	1 (1%)	0
31–40	0	6 (6%)	0
41+	0	0	0

[1] 76 total samples
[2] 99 total samples
[3] 41 total samples
[4] 9 (9 per cent.) of these breast samples had not more than 2 per cent. water
[5] All of the thigh samples had not more than 2 per cent. water

Table 2: Information Sheet No. 20/01 December 2001

Percentage water content in chicken	*Frozen, skinless chicken breasts products[1] Number of samples found with added water (percentage of those sampled)*
No water added	1 (1%)
0–10	4 (6%)
11–20	8 (12%)
21–30	35 (51%)
31–40	16 (24%)
41+	4 (6%)

[1] 68 total samples

Prescribing

Dr. Iddon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on anticipatory prescribing following the observations made by the Commission for Health Improvement following publication of their report 'Portsmouth Healthcare NHS Trust at Gosport War Memorial Hospital'. [80113]

Ms Blears: The Commission for Health Improvement (CHI) expressed serious concerns about anticipatory prescribing of medicines to older people on two wards in Gosport War Memorial hospital in 1998. During the course of its investigation in 2002, the CHI welcomed the introduction and adherence to policies regarding the administration, review and recording of medicines. Anticipatory prescribing was no longer evident on these wards.

The decision when and how much to prescribe is a matter for the clinical judgement of the doctor caring for the patient.

Pre-Payment Prescriptions

Mr. Flook: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what is the time taken to issue pre-payment certificates for NHS prescription charges is; and if he will make a statement. [80608]

(2) when the issuing of pre-payment certificates for NHS prescription charges was centralised in Newcastle-upon-Tyne. [80609]

(3) what estimate he has made of when the issuing of pre-payment certificates for prescription charges will meet the contract delivery target; and what that target is. [80610]

(4) for what reason the telephone number for inquiries about slow processing of pre-payment certificates now centralised in Newcastle-upon-Tyne was not included in the information sent to existing users. [80611]

(5) where the call centre that handles inquiries about delays in processing pre-payment certificates for prescription charges is physically based. [80612]

Mr. Lammy: The Prescription Pricing Authority (PPA) became responsible for the issue of pre-payment certificates (PPCs) in respect of applications received on or after 1 October. Applications sent before 1 October should have been dealt with by health authorities and the PPA telephone number for inquiries should therefore have been irrelevant to people who applied for PPCs before that date. A number of health authorities did, however, send applications received before 1 October to the PPA. Rather than return them and thus add further to the time taken to issue certificates, the PPA decided that they would issue the certificates themselves.

The target for issuing pre-payment certificates ordered by telephone is 14 days and that target is being met. The target for issuing PPCs by post is 21 calendar days of the application being received (as shown on the application form) and that target is being met. On 19 November applications received by post on 1 November were being processed. Applications made by phone are generally being processed within seven days. These targets will be kept under review.

The call centre that handles telephone requests for PPCs and inquiries is based in Nottingham. A further inquiry line is based in Newcastle.

Royal Hospital, Haslar

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the financial cost of *(a)* retaining services at the Royal Hospital Haslar and *(b)* bringing such services together on the Queen Alexandra Hospital site in Cosham. [80729]

Ms Blears: A review of the private finance initiative scheme to develop the Queen Alexandra Hospital site was undertaken in July 2002. I am advised by Hampshire and Isle of Wight Strategic health authority that the review clarified that the revenue consequences of the development of the Queen Alexandra Hospital site amounted to £44 million per annum.

The strategic health authority has also advised me that the review also considered the "do minimum option", which included the assumption that the Royal Hospital Haslar was retained. The revenue consequences of this option amounted to £43.2 million per annum. However, the overall conclusion of the review was that this option, including the retention of Haslar, was no more financially advantageous than the preferred development of the Queen Alexandra Hospital site. Moreover, the "do minimum" option failed to deliver the strategic service changes and clinical benefits required.

Mr. Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make a statement on the development of a Diagnostic and Treatment Centre at the Royal hospital Haslar. [80799]

Ms Blears: The first phase of the diagnosis and treatment centre at Royal hospital Haslar has been implemented and is progressing well. The second phase of the project is due for completion in December 2002 and at present, is on course to meet this target.

Sex Selection

Jim Dobbin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what factors underlay his recent decision to ask the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority to consult on the subject of sex selection for non-medical reasons; [81751]

(2) who the author is of the HFEA consultation document on sex selection; and who is responsible for assessing the results of the consultation. [81752]

Ms Blears: We asked the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority (HFEA) to review the practice of sex selection to take account of new techniques developed since the HFEA's last review in 1993. The consultation document was produced by the HFEA, who will assess the responses to it and report to Ministers.

Sickness Statistics

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many working days in the NHS were *(a)* lost and *(b)* lost in each of the past 10 years due to sickness of less than three days' duration in each of the last 10 years. [80952]

Mr. Hutton: National data on sickness absence levels in the national health service has only been collected since 1999. Information on working days lost in the NHS due to sickness of less than three days duration is not held centrally, but may be available from individual NHS employers.

The national sickness absence rate in 1999 was 4.96 per cent. which is equivalent to approximately 9.97 million working days. The sickness absence rate in 2000 was 4.68 per cent., which is equivalent to approximately 9.78 million working days. Sickness absence figures for 2001 are currently being analysed by the Department.

Social Services

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what assessment he has made of the cost to public funds of making non-residential social services free of charge for *(a)* people aged over 65 and *(b)* people in receipt of disability living allowance. [80455]

Jacqui Smith: In 1999–2000, total charge income for non-residential social services in England was £303 million. Of this, £232 million was in respect of services for people aged 65 or over.

No comprehensive estimate is available for charges paid by people receiving disability living allowance.

Warrington PCT

Helen Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the cost was of *(a)* the production and *(b)* the distribution of the leaflet entitled 'Your Guide to Local Health Services' recently distributed by Warrington PCT. [82055]

Jacqui Smith: The table shows production and distribution costs incurred by Warrington Primary Care Trust to issue the leaflet 'Your Guide to Local Health Services' to the population of Warrington. In order to keep costs to a minimum, distribution was made via free local newspapers.

	Costs £	*Number of copies*	*Cost per leaflet*
Production	5,768	94,000	6p
Distribution	1,204	—	—

HOME DEPARTMENT

Air and Pellet Guns

Mr. Roy: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what plans he has to launch an inquiry into the misuse of air and pellet guns; [80135]

(2) what plans he has to further restrict the sale of pellet and air guns. [80134]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: We have been looking at a number of options for dealing with the problem of air weapon misuse, and will bring forward proposals in due course.

Cyclists

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) on how many occasions in each of the last five years cyclists have been prosecuted for exceeding the speed limit; [80397]

(2) how many prosecutions there have been in each of the last five years of cyclists for *(a)* cycling the wrong way down one-way streets, *(b)* riding on pavements, *(c)* cycling through traffic lights at red, *(d)* using footpaths designated for pedestrians and *(e)* failing to carry cycle lights at night. [80398]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: The available information is contained in the table. This relates to neglect of traffic directions (which will include cycling the wrong way down one-way streets), riding on footpath (which will include riding on pavements and using footpaths designated for pedestrians), failing to obey signal (which will include cycling through traffic lights at red), lighting and reflector offences (which will include failing to carry cycle lights at night) and other offences (which will include any offences of exceeding the speed limit).

Information for 2001 will be published in December.

Persons[1] proceeded against at magistrates' courts for various offences connected with pedal cycles, England and Wales 1996 to 2000

Office Description	Principal statute	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000[2]
Neglect of traffic directions	Road Traffic Act 1988 Secs 35 and 36	181	92	121	63	52
Riding on footpath	Highways Act, 1835 Sec 72; (as amended by Local Government Act 1888 S.85(1), the Statute Law Revision (No. 2) Act 1888, Highways Act 1959 Sch. Criminal Justice Act 1967, 3rd Sch. and Criminal Justice Act 1982, ss 39 and 46 and Sch. 3); Metropolitan Police Act, 1839, Sec.54(7) and Byelaws.	423	648	1,055	376	223
Failing to obey signal	Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 Sec. 28(3)	24	43	19	45	6
Lighting and reflector offences	Road Traffic Act 1988 Sec. 81 and RVL Regs. 1989	382	412	624	459	275
Certain other offences	Various	16	7	16	25	15

Notes:
[1] Principal offence basis.
[2] Staffordshire Police Force were only able to submit sample data for persons proceeded against and convicted in the magistrates' courts for the year 2000. Although sufficient to estimate higher orders of data, these data are not robust enough at a detailed level and have been excluded from the table.

Deer Hunting Study

Mr. Gray: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on what grounds the Home Office Project Licence to the Joint Universities Study on Deer Hunting was refused. [80821]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: We have been unable on available information to identify a Joint Universities project licence application of the type described. A similar application was, however, made in 1998 from another source. It was made under the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986, and was for a project licence to conduct a study concerned with deer hunting.

It is not policy to disclose details of individual applications, but I can tell the hon. Gentleman that the application was refused because it was not considered to meet the cost/benefit criteria set out in section 5(4) of the 1986 Act. In other words, the adverse effects on the animals to be used were deemed to outweigh the likely benefit to accrue from the specified programme of work.

Heroin

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what the annual consumption of heroin was in each year since 1992; [81000]

(2) how many people have been convicted of dealing in heroin in each year since 1992. [80999]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: Although there is no robust estimate of the consumption of heroin, data are collected on the number of heroin seizures made in the United Kingdom, and these are shown for each year from 1992 to 2000 in Table 1.

Table 1. Number of heroin seizures made in the UK 1992–2000.

	Number of heroin seizures
1992	2,968
1993	3,678
1994	4,483
1995	6,479
1996	9,834
1997	12,508
1998	15,192
1999	15,519
2000	16,295

Table 2 shows the number of persons found guilty of dealing heroin in Great Britain between 1992 and 2000.

Table 2. Persons found guilty of dealing in heroin in Great Britain, 1992–2000[1]

	Number of persons[2]
1992	472
1993	706
1994	764
1995	942
1996	1,296
1997	2,060
1998	2,727
1999	3,248
2000	3,334[3]

[1] The term 'dealing' is taken to cover the following drug offences: possession with intent to supply unlawfully, unlawful supply, and unlawful import/export.
[2] As the same person may be found guilty of or cautioned for more than one offence, rows cannot be added together to produce totals.
[3] Import/Export data not available for 2000.
Source:
Home Office Drug Seizure and Offender Statistics, United Kingdom, 2000—Supplementary Tables

The Home Office Statistical Bulletin is available on the RDS website http:www.homeoffice.gov.uk.rds.pdfs2.hosb402.pdf, and copies are available in the Library.

Road Traffic Penalties

Sir Michael Spicer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he will publish the results of the consultation on road traffic penalties. [81095]

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: *[holding answer 18 November 2002]:* I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Glasgow, Cathcart (Tom Harris) on 24 July 2002, *Official Report*, column 1450W.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Burma (Refugees)

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how much humanitarian assistance her Department provides for refugees in Burma. [80564]

Clare Short: The situation for internally displaced people/refugees in Burma remains extremely vulnerable. Many of these people have taken refuge in remote,

inaccessible and politically sensitive areas, making it difficult to conduct any detailed humanitarian assessment of their situation. This financial year 2002–03, we have committed humanitarian assistance amounting to £2 million for both refugees and internally displaced people within Burma. This included funding through the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, the Burmese Border Consortium and the International Committee of the Red Cross.

Magistrates Courts (Greater Manchester)

Tony Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps the UK Government and other key donors are taking to address the shortfall in funding to the Afghan Government for promoting Afghanistan's recovery. [78215]

Clare Short: The international donor community has now disbursed $1.3 billion of the $1.8 billion pledge for 2002; of this, a total of $200 million has been paid into the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund, which is used by the Afghanistan Transitional Administration to meet recurrent costs and finance the most pressing of reconstruction requirements. Recent payments into the fund mean that the ATA now faces a far smaller potential budget deficit this financial year than was originally feared but my Department is continuing to work closely with other donors to help ensure budget requirements are fully met. In addition, I recently approved a contribution of $20 million in support of Afghanistan's arrears clearance with the major international financial institutions, and am confident this will enable the Asia development bank and world bank to finance the implementation of substantial reconstruction initiatives in the near future.

Tony Worthington: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps the UK Government and other donor countries are taking to address the shortfall in funds to the WFP and UNHCR in Afghanistan. [78216]

Clare Short: We understand that UNHCR and WFP programmes for 2002 for Afghanistan have been well-resourced so far (to the order of 90 per cent. and 75 per cent. respectively). So far in the current financial year, the UK has contributed 4 million and 2.2 million respectively to UNHCR and WFP programmes.

Overall needs for emergency support are being revised in light of the increasing number of returned refugees and in anticipation of the coming winter. A consolidated appeal is due to be launched at the Afghan Support Group meeting in December, in Oslo. The basic emergency needs will come under the human capital pillar of the National Development Framework, for which the Afghan Government has determined it will allocate 45 per cent of all external funds received.

We have now committed 65 million to Afghanistan for the current financial year (the original allocation was 40 million). We will consider future support in light of the Transitional Assistance Programme for Afghanistan and the priorities set out in the National Development Framework, in consultation with the Afghan authorities.

Malawi

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if she will make a statement on the assistance given by her Department to increase the provision of clean water to the people of Malawi. [82688]

Clare Short: My Department operates the largest bilateral donor programme in Malawi (70 million in 2002–03). Our focus is on health, education, governance and sustainable livelihoods. We have no involvement in the water sector.

Ministerial salaries

Mr. Bercow: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what the annual cost was of Ministerial salaries in her Department in *(a)* 1997–98 and *(b)* 2001–02. [60943]

Clare Short: The levels of Ministerial salaries are recommended by the Senior Salaries Review Body. From May 1997, in this Department there was one Cabinet Minister at an annual salary of £43, 991 and one Parliamentary Under Secretary of State at an annual salary of £23, 623. From June 2001, for the same two posts, the respective salaries were £68,157 and £26,835.

Overseas Development Assistance

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what representations she has made to other international donors regarding the untying of overseas development assistance. [80948]

Clare Short: The international community has this year untied financial aid to the least-developed countries. We welcome this, but we want other donors to follow the UK example and untie all development assistance for all countries. As the largest block of development finance, Europe should give a lead. The Commission have tabled proposals for further untying which I welcomed at this week's Council meeting. We want to see a clear timetable for future progress.

Pharmaceutical Sales

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what plans her Department has to increase world pharmaceutical sales *(a)* to the developing countries and *(b)* to Africa. [80557]

Clare Short: The Government are working to bring about increased supplies of essential medicines to developing countries, in a way which is sustainable and predictable and ensures they reach the poorest.

The Government will shortly be launching the report of the UK's high level working group on access to medicines. The report is a result of a year's collaboration between representatives of UK industry, WHO, WTO, The European Commission, a developing country and international foundations. It outlines an approach intended to facilitate voluntary differential pricing of essential medicines for the poorest developing countries-and all of sub-Saharan Africa-as the international operational norm. The UK is committed to working with others to take the report's recommendations forward as a matter of urgency. The

report complements ongoing work in the context the Doha Ministerial Declaration on TRIPS and public health, and it also emphasises the importance of sustainable financing and reliable health and supply systems. The UK has already pledged $200 million over five years to the Global Fund to Fight TB, AIDS and Malaria (GFATM), and has committed over £1 billion since 1997 to strengthen developing countries' health systems. The Government have also introduced tax incentives to encourage longer-term development of new medicines to treat AIDS, TB and malaria in developing countries.

Staff Costs

Mr. Bercow: (Buckingham): Asked the Secretary of State for International Development, how much and what proportion of the Departmental expenditure limit for 2002–03 will be accounted for by staff costs; what the figures were for 2001–02; and if she will make a statement. [61027]

Clare Short: Spending on staff from DFID's Administration Costs was £41 million in 2001–2, which was 1.3 per cent. Of the Departmental Expenditure Limit (DEL). On the same basis, spending in 2002–3 is forecast to be around £45 million, or 1.3 per cent of DFID's DEL. We expect spending on staff to rise over the next Spending Review period but at a significantly slower rate than the Departmental Spending Limit

Zimbabwe (Food Aid)

Mrs. Spelman: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what her strategy is for delivering food to vulnerable communities in Zimbabwe when the Government of Zimbabwe obstructs food aid. [80574]

Clare Short: My Department has provided over £38 million in humanitarian assistance to Zimbabwe since September 2001. This has included food assistance through the United Nations World Food Programme (WFP) and through non-governmental organisations. There has been relatively little obstruction in these operations that cover more than half of the country's 57 districts and continue to expand.

If obstruction does occur, we work closely in support of the United Nations Humanitarian Co-ordinator and the World Food Programme in engaging with the Government of Zimbabwe to ensure that the obstruction is dealt with and the distribution of food resumed as quickly as possible. For example, Save the Children UK has now obtained written clearances to resume its feeding programme in Binga.

LORD CHANCELLOR'S DEPARTMENT

Mr Peter Jewell

Mr. Kaufman: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department, when the Lord Chancellor intends to reply to the letter dated 3 September from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Mr Peter Jewell. [81712]

Yvette Cooper: A reply was sent on 19 November 2002. My right hon. Friend wrote originally to the Home Secretary. The letter was then passed to the Lord Chancellor for reply in late October.

Rape

Vera Baird: To ask the Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Department (1) what steps the Lord Chancellor will take to ensure that the Court of Appeal adopts the recommendations of the Sentencing Advisory Panel in sentencing for offences or rape; [81910]

(2) if the Lord Chancellor will monitor the implementation by the Court of Appeal of the recommendations of the Sentencing Advisory Panel in sentencing for offences of rape; [81928]

(3) what discussions the Lord Chancellor has had with the Court of Appeal in connection with the implementation of the recommendations of the Sentencing Authority Panel on sentencing for offences of rape. [81929]

Yvette Cooper: The Lord Chancellor is grateful to the Sentencing Advisory Panel for publishing its advice to the Court of Appeal, which proposes a revision of the current sentencing guidelines for the offence of rape.

The decision on whether or not to adopt this advice is for the Court of Appeal alone and is not a matter in which the Lord Chancellor can intervene.

NORTHERN IRELAND

British Irish Joint Secretariat

Mr. Donaldson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, what is the total cost per annum of the British Irish Joint Secretariat, based at Windsor House in Belfast; and how the cost are allocated between the British and Irish Governments . [80676]

Mr. Browne: The expenditure of the British irish Intergovernmental Secretariat is met by the two Governments. The total cost to the British Government in 2001–02 was £554,000.

Mr. Donaldson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, how many staff are employed by the British Irish Joint Secretariat at Windsor House in Belfast; and what proportion of these staff members are appointed by the *(a)* British and *(b)* Irish Governments. [80677]

Mr. Browne: The British Irish Intergovernmental Secretariat comprises 25 members of staff, 12 employed by the Northern Irleland Office and 13 employed by the Irish Government.

Mr. Donaldson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, what are the main functions of the British Irish Joint Secretariat based at Windsor House in Belfast. [80678]

Mr. Browne: The British Irish Intergovernmental Conference and the Secretariat were established by the British-Irish Agreement, which took effect on Thursday 2 December 1999. the role of the Secretariat is to support the Conference. As such it provides a formal

channel of communication to promote bilateral co-operation between the two governments on non-devolved Northern Ireland matters. [80678]

Congestion Charging

Mr. Christopher Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the policy is of his Department in relation to the reimbursement of Central London road user charges incurred by its employees. [81841]

Jane Kennedy: It is general departmental travel planning policy that staff should not use cars to commute to and from work. However, staff on official business who are required to drive their own vehicles, or hire vehicles, within the charging zone will be reimbursed.

Mr. Chope: : To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the estimated cost is to his Department of the Central London Road User Charging Scheme for *(a)* 17 February 2003 to 31 March 2003, and *(b)* 1 April 2003 to 31 March 2004. [81880]

Jane Kennedy: All civil servants are responsible for payment of their own everyday home to office travel costs. The introduction of a Central London user charge will not affect this basic condition of service.

Any additional costs to the Department as a result of the congestion charging scheme will be just one element within wider costs which have to be met from budgets for official travelling and other costs.

Electoral Identity Cards

Mr. Banks: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will make a statement on the percentage take-up among electors of the new electoral identity cards. [81574]

Mr. Browne: A question was included in this year's Annual Canvass registration form which asked electors if they would need an electoral identity card. Once the Annual Canvass is complete on 29 November and the new Electoral Register is published, the Chief Electoral Officer will be able to target his efforts and resources to those people who have indicated that they need the card. As of 16 November 220,000 (18 per cent. of the 1.2 million Northern Ireland electorate) had done so.

The Government is committed to providing those people who require one with an electoral identity card in time for the Assembly election on 1 May 2003. This also remains the target for the removal of all forms of non-photographic ID from the list of specified documents acceptable as proof of identity at the polling station.

Petrol Prices

Mr. Beggs: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what information he collates on the average price of petrol paid by motorists in *(a)* England, *(b)* Scotland, *(c)* Wales and *(d)* Northern Ireland; when he last discussed fuel prices with major companies supplying petrol to Northern Ireland retail outlets; and if he will make representations to reduce the price paid by Northern Ireland motorists at petrol stations. [80807]

Mr. Pearson: The Department of Trade and Industry obtains, on a weekly basis from petroleum suppliers, the average UK price charged for petrol on the forecourts. DTI provides this information to the European Commission. The Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment does not collate separate information.

I have not currently had discussions with major companies supplying petrol to Northern Ireland retailers. The level of pricing is a commercial decision taken by the companies in the petrol supply industry. Unless there is evidence of "price fixing" Government cannot intervene in those commercial decisions.

Prison Officers

Mrs. Iris Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many prison officers have been informed they are on the intelligence list stolen by SF/IRH, how many have been accepted on to the S.P.E.D. scheme for alternative housing; and what the total amount offered to those who choose to stay in their homes for installing additional security measures has been. [80824]

Jane Kennedy: Of the 1,426 names of Northern Ireland Prison Service Staff on the PSNI list, the vast majority have been informed either orally or in writing, efforts to inform others are continuing daily.

To date 40 prison staff have applied to be accepted onto the SPED scheme. This is operated by the NI Housing Executive and so far no decisions have been confirmed.

Officers who decide to remain in their current homes are individually assessed regarding their security needs. As this matter is ongoing the cost of the work involved is not available.

PRIME MINISTER

Downing Street Air Conditioning

Jane Griffiths: To ask the Prime Minister what coolant is used in the air conditioning recently installed in Downing Street. [80816]

The Prime Minister: All coolants in the air conditioning units in Downing Street comply with the UK Climate Change Programme and all relevant European Standards on the use of HFCs and safety in the workplace.

Gifts

Mr. Alan Williams: To ask the Prime Minister what rules govern the retention of gifts given to members of the Royal Family when they are undertaking official tours. [80816]

The Prime Minister: This is a matter for the Palace. However I understand that the Palace issues internal guidance on gifts.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Firefighters' Dispute

Mr. Hawkins: To ask the Solicitor General what discussions she has had with the Attorney-General, the Home Secretary, the Lord Chancellor and the Deputy Prime Minister about the legal aspects of the fire dispute and the implications of trade union legislation when there is a risk to life. [81661]

The Solicitor-General *[holding answer 19 November 2002]:* The Law Officers are concerned with the legal aspects of the fire dispute in three ways. We are responsible to Parliament for the Crown Prosecution Service, which is responsible for considering whether to bring prosecutions where hoax calls have been made. We are also legal advisers to the Government. There is a long-standing convention, followed by successive Governments and reflected in the Ministerial Code, that both the content of legal advice to the Government and the fact that it has been given remains confidential. Thirdly, the Attorney General has the power to apply, when he thinks it appropriate, to the High Court for an injunction to prevent breach of the criminal law, including offences under trade union legislation. In making such decisions he acts as guardian of the public interest.

TRADE AND INDUSTRY

Bilateral Trade

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry (1) what the total level of bilateral trade was with each EU applicant country in the last 12 months; [82352]

(2) what the level of bi-lateral trade with each of the EU applicant countries was in the last 12 months. [81652]

Ms Hewitt: According to information published by HM Customs and Excise, the value of UK trade in goods with the EU applicant countries, for the 12-month period ended August 2002, was as follows:

£ million

	UK imports	*UK exports*
Malta	168.9	232.7
Estonia	320.7	101.8
Latvia	433.3	76.4
Lithuania	249.9	151.3
Poland	1,235.6	1,331.3
Czech Republic	1,247.6	1,081.9
Slovakia	200.6	201.3
Hungary	798.3	715.5
Slovenia	165.5	169.4
Cyprus	237.6	276.7
Romania	494.5	394.4
Bulgaria	113.1	133.8

BNFL

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make it her policy to seek a reduction in the movements of *(a)* high-level and *(b)* intermediate-level radioactive material by BNFL. [80861]

Mr. Wilson *[holding answer 20 November 2002]:* The number of movements of radioactive material undertaken by BNFL is dependent on operational requirements and is a matter for BNFL. I have no reason to believe that BNFL or any other relevant operator would undertake unnecessary movements of radioactive material The transport of radioactive material in the UK is subject to stringent regulatory requirements in respect of safety and security.

Business Link

Mr. Prisk: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the cost is of the Business Link advertisement campaign broken down by *(a)* newspapers, *(b)* radio and television. [80482]

Nigel Griffiths: The current advertising campaign was launched in September 2002. The costs associated with the campaign to date are:

£

	(a) Newspapers	*(b) Radio*	*(c) Television*
Media	549,978	489,255	2,139,063
Production[1]	62,980	44,202	239,275

[1] Excludes COI fees and VAT.

Phase 2 of the campaign is due to run in the new year with advertising planned to run on TV, radio, press and online.

Car Parking

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many car parking spaces are available to *(a)* employees of her Department and *(b)* visitors to her Department within the proposed Central London Road User Charging Zone. [81866]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 19 November 2002]:* Within the proposed central London charging zone there are:

103 car parking spaces available to employees of the Department, and

12 car parking spaces available to visitors to the Department.

Congestion Charging

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the policy is of her Department in relation to the reimbursement of Central London road user charges incurred by its employees. [81846]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 19 November 2002]:* The DTI policy in relation to reimbursement of central London road user charges incurred by its employees is to reimburse the costs only if necessarily incurred on essential departmental business.

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the estimated cost is to her Department of the Central London Road User Charging Scheme for *(a)* 17 February 2003 to 31 March 2003, and *(b)* 1 April 2003 to 31 March 2004. [81885]

Ms Hewitt *[holding answer 19 November 2002]:* The DTI does not maintain central records of the number of staff who make essential business journeys into the area covered by the central London congestion charging zone. To obtain data on which to produce a meaningful estimate for the information requested would entail disproportionate cost.

Debt Swapping

Mr. Allen: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry if she will make a statement on her policy towards debt swapping and the rainforest. [81243]

Ms Hewitt: Under ECGD's Debt Conversion Scheme, a percentage of a country's rescheduled debt stock (usually 10 or 20 per cent.) can be swapped for 'certain' projects. When evaluating such requests, ECGD will consider the potential contribution of any project towards the social, economic and environmental development of the country. ECGD is willing to consider projects involving rainforest protection. Any project must be jointly approved by the debtor Government and ECGD and comply with ECGD's Business Principles.

The Debt Conversion Scheme does not affect debt relief for HIPCs (Highly Indebted Poor Countries), for whom the UK Government have pledged to write-off 100 per cent. of their UK debt. Debt write-offs for HIPCs are contingent on country commitment to a Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper process.

Employment Agencies

Dr. Cable: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what the Government's policy is on the responsibility of employment agencies to interview and assess those responding to job advertisements, where the advertisement is published *(a)* in a newspaper and *(b)* on the internet; and if she will make a statement. [82021]

Alan Johnson: Under the legislation covering the private recruitment industry, employment agencies and employment businesses, who have placed job vacancy advertisements in either a newspaper or on the internet, before supplying or introducing a work-seeker to an employer, are required to make all such inquiries as are reasonably practicable to establish that the worker-seeker is suitable and has such qualifications as are required by law and that employment of that work-seeker by the employer would not breach any other duty or restriction imposed by law.

It is in the best interests of all those involved in this sector to ensure that the legislation covering the private recruitment industry operates effectively and is relevant to the flexible labour market of today and of the future. On-line recruitment companies have proposed that the Employment Agency legislation should not apply to on-line job boards. I will consider the case for treating on-line job boards as a special case on its merits within the normal framework.

India

Keith Vaz: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry when she next plans to visit India. [82045]

Ms Hewitt: I plan to visit India early in the new year 2003.

Industrial Tribunals

Vernon Coaker: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry what assessment she has made of the time it takes for industrial tribunals to hear individual cases; and if she will make a statement. [82107]

Alan Johnson: In the financial year 2001–02, the Employment Tribunals heard 69 per cent. of individual cases within 26 weeks of receipt. In the current financial year, as at the end of October 2002, Employment Tribunals have heard 72 per cent. of individual cases within 26 weeks of receipt.

This achievement is in the context of a 60 per cent. increase in applications over the three years to March 2001. At March 2002, the level of applications remained high in comparison to previous years.

Parliamentary Answer

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry pursuant to the answer of the Chancellor of the Exchequer to the Member for South Norfolk (Mr. Bacon) of 10 June if he will place details of the direction in the Library; and if he will make a statement. [80620]

Ms Hewitt: I have no plans to do so under Exemption 13 of the Open Government Code, on grounds of commercial confidentiality where disclosure would harm the competitive position of a third party.

UK Solar Industry

Mike Gapes: To ask the Secretary of State for Trade and Industry how many jobs have been created in the UK Solar PV industry since 1997; and if she will make a statement. [81750]

Mr. Wilson: The DTI's 1996 Sectoral Competitiveness Analysis for PV estimated that there were a maximum of 350 people employed fulltime in the manufacture, supply, design, consultancy, and research areas. A subsequent review in 2001 concluded that though there had been some expansion and reduction of staff in individual organisations the overall figure had remained about the same.

Since then, with the implementation of the £10 million Domestic and Large-Scale Field Trials, and the launch of the £20 million First Phase of the Major Photovoltaic Demonstration Programme this number has undoubtedly risen.

Renewables UK is conducting a GAP analysis, which will include figures on employment. This will be published next year.

TRANSPORT

Minicabs

Linda Perham: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what research he has undertaken into the links between illegal and unlicensed mini-cab touting and other crimes; and what the findings were. [80536]

Mr. Jamieson: The Department has not carried out any research into the links between taxi touting and other crimes. Taxi touting is a criminal offence and enforcement is a matter for local licensing authorities and the police.

A249

Mr. Wyatt: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement about progress with the A249 Iwade to Queenborough improvement, with special reference to the *(a)* start date, *(b)* finish date and *(c)* Compulsory Purchase Order required. [82228]

Mr. Jamieson: I have asked the Chief Executive of the Highways Agency, Tim Matthews, to write to my hon. Friend.

Letter from Tim Matthews to Mr. Derek Wyatt, dated November 2002:

I have been asked by David Jamieson to reply to your recent question about progress on the A249 Iwade Bypass to Queenborough Improvement scheme.

This scheme is incorporated within the A249 Stockbury (M2) to Sheerness DBFO project which is currently out to tender, with a tender return date of 6 December. We expect to award the contract in November next year.

The actual delivery programme for the improvement scheme will be determined by the successful DBFO Company. At this stage of the procurement process our assumed programme is as follows:

Works commencement date-01 March 2004

Road open to traffic-31 March 2006

Completion of Works-01 July 2006

It should be noted that whilst tenders are due to be submitted by 6 December, a significant period of negotiation is required between return of tenders and award of contract. The period between the date of award and the start date for the works allows for completion of detailed scheme design.

With regard to the Compulsory Purchase Orders for the scheme, these were made in June 2001 and will remain valid until June 2004. This period can be extended beyond 2004 provided that Notices to Treat are served prior to this date.

Airport Staff (Security)

Miss Anne McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what security checks are being undertaken on airport-related staff on recruitment of *(a)* baggage handlers, *(b)* dispatches, *(c)* security staff and *(d)* other airport workers. [80959]

Mr. Jamieson: Before being able to work airside, all persons, including baggage handlers and dispatchers, are required to have undergone a five year background check on their education, training and employment record, and to have have submitted proof of identity. UK legislation requires that those carrying out listed security activities at UK airports are also in possession of a government security clearance known as a Counter Terrorist Check. All others working airside are to be subject to a Criminal Record Check.

Notwithstanding these checks, all baggage handlers, dispatchers and other airport workers are screened on each occasion before being able to enter the airport's Restricted Zone.

Airports

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what cost benefit analysis has been conducted by his Department or is planned of the *(a)* economic, *(b)* social and *(c)* environmental costs and benefits from *(i)* new airports and (ii) airport expansion, which (A) has taken place since 1997 and (B) is planned. [81410]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 20 November 2002]:* These issues have been covered extensively in the Government's recent airport studies. This included an assessment of the economic, social and environmental benefits and impacts of various airport development options, both at existing and new sites. The findings are set out in "The Future Development of Air Transport in the United Kingdom" consultation documents.

Modal Shifts

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport (1) what *(a)* discussions his Department has had or plans to have and *(b)* representations have been received by his Department with regard to the past and potential future role of improvements to public transport access at United Kingdom airports upon *(i)* past increases and future total passenger and freight numbers and *(ii)* past and future *(A)* economic, *(B)* environment and *(C)* social impacts; [81415]

(2) what research has been conducted by his Department or is planned on the potential impact of high speed rail links on the modal shift of *(a)* internal and *(b)* international air passengers and freight away from air; what incentives have been provided or actions have been taken or are planned to encourage such a modal shift; [81400]

(3) what assessment and research has been made by his Department or is planned of the past and potential future impact of improvements to public transport access at United Kingdom airports upon *(a)* past increases and future total passenger and freight numbers and *(b)* past and future *(i)* economic, *(ii)* environment and *(iii)* social impacts; [81414]

(4) what *(a)* discussions his Department has had or plans to have and *(b)* representations have been received by his Department with regard to the potential impact of high speed rail links on the modal shift of *(i)* internal and *(ii)* international air passengers and freight away from air; and if he will place copies of related documentation in the Library; [81401]

(5) what research has been conducted by his Department or is planned on the causal processes and mechanisms responsible for *(a)* past and *(b)* potential future modal shifts between air transport and other modes of transport for *(i)* passengers and *(ii)* freight transport, distinguishing between *(A)* internal and *(B)* international flights. [81398]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 20 November 2002]:* The Department's policies aim to deliver safe, reliable and secure transport for everyone that respects the environment, encouraging modal shift where appropriate.

The research which has been carried out into recent and future public transport improvements for access to United Kingdom airports and on rail-air mode shift has been extensive and is set out in the seven consultation documents "The Future Development of Air Transport in the United Kingdom" published on 23 July and the background technical reports which support them. The latter include reports commissioned by the Strategic Rail Authority and the Commission for Integrated Transport on the potential for rail-air substitution and the different environmental effects of journeys made using different modes on key inter-regional journeys within the UK.

The Strategic Rail Authority is also conducting a study into a potential North-South high speed line which will consider its likely impact on other modes, including air.

The service quality improvements resulting from use of the Channel Tunnel Rail Link are expected to result in some transfer of international air passengers to Eurostar. However, the forecast of Eurostar demand does not allow the transfer from international air services to be separately identified. The report of this research was not published because of the subject's commercially sensitive nature.

Buses

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what recent guidelines he has issued on the use of bus lanes by cars. [82082]

Mr. Jamieson: Local Transport Note 1/97, Keeping Buses Moving, was published in 1997. This includes advice on the use of bus lanes by other vehicles, including cars.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the percentage occupancy is of the UK bus fleet on normal timetable services. [81020]

Mr. Spellar: The Department collects information on the number of bus passenger journeys in Great Britain, but does not have information on bus occupancy.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what research has *(a)* been conducted and *(b)* is planned by his Department on the effects of marketing upon bus usage. [81733]

Mr. Jamieson: No research has been commissioned specifically on the effects of marketing on bus usage. However, we have obtained relevant information from research into quality bus partnerships and from surveys on satisfaction with the quality of local bus services.

Bus operators are well aware of the benefits of good marketing of services. Marketing includes a variety of activities such as branding, publicity, timetable information, fares and tickets. A task group established by the Bus Partnership Forum, which comprises industry, local and central government representatives, is examining a number of surveys conducted by Transport for London, local transport authorities and operating companies to evaluate the success of marketing initiatives on particular routes or networks.

Camera Systems

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to permit camera systems to be used to aid enforcement against illegal turning movements by vehicles; and if he will make a statement. [80490]

Mr. Jamieson: If approved by Parliament, the London Local Authorities and Transport for London Bill will allow London authorities and Transport for London to enforce compliance with signs indicating banned turning movements using camera systems. Owners of vehicles not complying with signs would receive a penalty charge. The Government have no objection to such enforcement in principle and will follow its piloting in London with interest.

Channel Tunnel Rail Link

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when he expects the channel tunnel rail link to be fully operational; and if he will make a statement. [82551]

Mr. Jamieson: Section 1 of the CTRL (channel tunnel to Fawkham Junction, north Kent) is now over 90 per cent. complete and on target for completion by the end of 2003. Section 2 of the CTRL (Kent to St. Pancras in London) is over 30 per cent. complete on target for opening in early 2007.

Cycles

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many people in the United Kingdom own pedal cycles. [80394]

Mr. Jamieson: Information is not available about how many people in the United Kingdom own pedal cycles. However, from the National Travel Survey, the percentage of households in Great Britain owning bicycles in 1999–2001 was as follows:

Bicycles	*Percentage of households*
1999–2001	
None	58
1	17
2	13
3	6
4	3
5 or more	2

Mr. Ben Chapman: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will estimate how many people used a pedal cycle at least once a week in each of the last five years. [80395]

Mr. Jamieson: The National Travel Survey for Great Britain has asked about the frequency of bicycle use

since 1998. The percentage of people who have said that they cycle at least once a week is as follows:

1998: 14

1999: 14

2000: 15

2001: 14

Diesel Trains (Stopping Distances)

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the safe braking distance is for a diesel commuter train to stop from a speed of 70mph. [81246]

Mr. Spellar: The Health and Safety Executive have advised that, assuming a standard-load diesel commuter train, on a flat gradient with good rail/wheel adhesion conditions, approximately:

816 metres using defensive driving brake application;

544 metres using full service brake application; and

408 metres using an emergency brake application.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the safe braking distance is of a 125 mph diesel train to stop from maximum speed. [81247]

Mr. Spellar: The Health and Safety Executive have advised that, assuming a standard-load diesel commuter train, on a flat gradient with good rail/wheel adhesion conditions, approximately:

2,568 metres using defensive driving brake application;

1,713 Metres using full service brake application; and

1,283 Metres using with an emergency brake application.

DVLA

Clive Efford: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on the accuracy of the information held by the DVLA. [80805]

Mr. Jamieson: DVLA carried out a postal survey in January 2001 to establish the overall accuracy of its records. The survey indicated that 92 per cent. of mail issued by the Agency was delivered to the correct vehicle keeper. Work is underway to improve further on these accuracy levels.

Emissions

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what emissions of *(a)* carbon monoxide, *(b)* hydrocarbons, *(c)* oxides of nitrogen and *(d)* particulates are generated by *(i)* a four car new DMU train on a normal commuter service, (ii) a new bus on an urban test cycle, and (iii) an average new car on an urban test cycle. [81254]

Mr. Spellar: The emissions are shown in the following table. The data for road vehicles are from the 2001 National Atmospheric Emissions Inventory. The data for rail are from a recent study carried out by NETCEN.

g/vehicle km	*NO_x*	*PM*	*CO*	*HC*
4 car DMU train	26.75	0.85	8.16	2.51
Urban bus	6.748	0.216	1.625	0.725
Urban car	0.190	0.0058	0.813	0.046

The train emissions are for a Virgin Voyager Class 221 with one power car and three trailer cars. It should, however, be noted that the majority of commuting by train is in London and the south east, where the majority of trains are electric and so have zero local emissions. The car and bus data refer to Euro III standards (ie current standards for new vehicles) at an urban speed. The car emissions are averages, weighted by the proportion of petrol and diesel cars in the fleet. A full environmental comparison would need to incorporate occupancy figures but comparative data per passenger km are not available.

Heathrow (Land Values)

Tom Brake: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment has been made by his Department or is planned of the potential value of land at Heathrow for uses other than aviation; what other *(a)* social, *(b)* economic and *(c)* environmental assessment has taken place. [81406]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 20 November 2002]:* As part of the South East and East of England Regional Air Services (SERAS) analysis a wide ranging social, economic and environmental assessment of airport development options at Heathrow was undertaken. These are summarised in "The Future Development of Air Transport in the United Kingdom—South East" consultation document. The analysis takes account of the costs of acquiring, at market value, the additional land which would be required. No assessment has been made, or is planned, of the potential value of the existing airport land at Heathrow for uses other than aviation.

IT Security

Brian White: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps he has taken to review the security of the Department's IT system; and how many digital attacks there were on the Department's system in *(a)* October and *(b)* 2002. [80770]

Mr. Jamieson: The security of the Department's IT system is kept under constant review. Separate figures are not available for the number of digital attacks on the Department's IT system, as the Department shares with the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister the IT network of their predecessor (the Department for Transport, Local Government, and the Regions). For that IT network, the number of digital attacks detected was *(a)* 18 in October and *(b)* 266 in 2002 up to the end of October.

London Traffic

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many people enter London by *(a)* the M1 and *(b)* the Great Northern railway between 8 am and 9 am on a working weekday morning. [81252]

Mr. Spellar: The average number of vehicles entering London by the M1 between 8 am and 9 am on a week day morning is 4,240. The Highways Agency does not have details of the number of occupants in these vehicles.

The Great North Eastern Railway (GNER) brings into London Kings Cross on average 2,800 people in the hour 8 am. to 9 am. on a normal working weekday. This figure may fluctuate a little as commuters do not always travel on the same train.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many people enter London by *(a)* the Great Western Railway and *(b)* the M4 between 8 am and 9 am on a working weekday morning. [81253]

Mr. Spellar: There are between 11,000 and 12,000 people entering London between 8 am and 9 am using trains which operate into London Paddington. The exact figure will vary a little from day to day as not all commuters use the same trains every day.

The average number of vehicles entering London by the M4 between 8 am and 9 am on a weekday morning is 5,520. The Highways Agency does not have details of the number of occupants in these vehicles.

Maritime and Coastguard Agency

Mr. Collins: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make a statement on his restructuring of the Maritime and Coastguard Agency; and what further plans he has to restructure it. [81657]

Mr. Jamieson: The structure and management of the Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MCA) are matters for its chief executive, Maurice Storey. Mr. Storey is responsible for ensuring that the agency meets its targets effectively and efficiently. All chief executives must keep organisational structures under review to ensure that they remain fit for purpose.

Merchant Navy

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to encourage recruitment of *(a)* British officers and *(b)* cadets in the Merchant Navy. [80958]

Mr. Jamieson: In December 1998 this Government's introduction of a tonnage based corporation tax for UK tax resident shipping companies requires applicant companies to satisfy a minimum training obligation and recruit and train one British Cadet for every 15 officers. We estimate the number of cadets undergoing training for the year, as of October 2002, to be in the order of 650. The total cumulative training commitment for the training year beginning October 2002 is 660. This is an encouraging and significant increase on previous years.

Under the Support for Maritime Training Scheme the Government has made available 9.4million for merchant navy training for this financial year.

The Government appreciates that the consequence of the tonnage tax has been an increased demand for cadets. We are therefore heartened and supportive of the industry led initiative to raise the profile of the maritime industry in the eyes of the general public. This major campaign, co-ordinated by the Chamber of Shipping, has the active support of over 70 maritime organisations including the Maritime and Coastguard Agency and goes under the title of "Sea Vision UK". The campaign is gaining momentum and hopes to attract public attention at the London Boat Show in January 2003 and other events through the year.

Ministerial Cars

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many cars are *(a)* owned and *(b)* leased by the Department for the use of Ministers and employees. [81022]

Mr. Spellar: *(a)* 512 *(b)* 26.

New Roads and Railways

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many miles of new road are under construction in London and the South-East under the supervision of the Highways Agency. [81256]

Mr. Spellar: The Highways Agency is supervising the construction of 35.2 miles of road in the counties of Buckinghamshire, Hertfordshire, Essex and Kent. This includes the on-line widening of the A2/M2 road.

Transport for London is responsible for roads in London.

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much has been spent in each year from 1990 on the construction of *(a)* new roads and *(b)* new railway lines, excluding in both cases the refurbishment of existing capacity. [81576]

Mr. Jamieson *[holding answer 20 November 2002]:* The information requested is shown in the table.

Expenditure on the construction of new roads and rail lines

£million[1]

	National roads	*Jubilee line extension*
1990–91	1,270	41
1991–92	1,277	62
1992–93	1,309	67
1993–94	1,345	255
1994–95	1,218	371
1995–96	1,125	588
1996–97	1,007	657
1997–98	875	476
1998–99	714	283
1999–2000	663	655
2000–01	677	0
2001–02	829	0
2002–03	1,032	0
2003–04	1,003	0
2004–05	1,196	0
2005–06	1,206	0
Total	16,746	3,455

[1] Outturn prices

Notes:

Total expenditure on construction of the channel tunnel rail link to the end of 2000–01 was £1,343 million. An annual breakdown of this figure could be provided only at disproportionate cost. An additional £983 million was spent in 2001–02.

The figures for national roads are not on a consistent basis over the whole period because of a change in the way that the information was classified from 1994–95 onwards. The figures from 2002–03 are for all work on national roads other than maintenance, although actual expenditure will depend on progress on specific schemes.

The table excludes spending on the construction of new local roads because this could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

The JLE figure for 1999–2000 reflects an estimated accrual in London Transport's accounts for 1999–2000 to cover Jubilee line extension works in future years.

These figures exclude spending on the construction of light rail schemes.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many miles of *(a)* new railway line and *(b)* new dual carriageway road he plans in *(i)* 2003–04 and (ii) 2004–05. [81027]

Mr. Spellar: The first section of the Channel Tunnel Rail Link is expected to open by the end of 2003. This is 46 miles of new railway, the first major new railway line in over 100 years. Other proposals for enhancement to the network are set out in the Strategic Rail Authority's Strategic Plan, which it is required to update annually.18.2 miles of new dual carriageway trunk road are planned to be opened in the remainder of 2002–03, 64.9 miles of new dual carriageway trunk road are planned to be opened in 2003–04 and 7.9 miles of new dual carriageway trunk road are planned to be opened in 2004–05.

Additional dual carriageway standard local authority roads are planned to be opened over these years; the timetable for their construction is in the hands of the relevant local authority.

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many miles of *(a)* new dual carriageway road and *(b)* new railway line have been constructed in the last two years. [81028]

Mr. Spellar: 11.4 miles of new dual carriageway trunk and local road have been constructed in 2000 and 20.2 miles of new dual carriageway trunk and local road have been constructed in 2001 No new railway lines were constructed in 2000 or 2001.

New Station (Wokingham)

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport when the project for a new station at Wokingham will begin on the ground. [81258]

Mr. Spellar: A Rail Passenger Partnership bid has been received, and is being evaluated by the Strategic Rail Authority, which will meet South West Trains soon to discuss the matter further.

Paddington Station

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many trains an hour can enter Paddington from the west; and what his plans are for capacity for Paddington. [81249]

Mr. Spellar: There are approximately 28 trains per hour entering London Paddington station at peak times. The Strategic Rail Authority has invited comments on a consultation paper on its capacity utilisation policy. In order to make the best use of existing capacity at Paddington, the Authority intends to create a new Greater Western franchise out of the existing First Great Western, Wessex and Thames franchises.

Rail Projects

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list those projects from the Strategic Rail Authority's Strategic Plan launched in January which have been *(a)* amended, *(b)* dropped and *(c)* added subsequently; and what the *(i)* timing and (ii) total cost of each project was. [81739]

Mr. Jamieson: The SRA is required to update its Strategic Plan annually. We expect a revised version to be published in early 2003.

Road Schemes

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will list those major road schemes in the local transport settlements for 1999 to 2001 which were *(a)* provisionally approved and *(b)* considered 'work in progress', and which have been subsequently *(i)* approved, (ii) 'provisionally approved' and (iii) where there is work still in progress. [81746]

Mr. Jamieson: The following are the current classifications for schemes which were "provisionally approved" by Ministers in the local transport settlements between 1999 and 2001. Those marked with an * were originally classified as "work in progress" in a previous settlement.

(i) Approved

The following five schemes are open to traffic:
Ashby Bypass Stage 2 (Leicestershire)
A131 Great Leighs Bypass (Essex)
Manchester/Salford Inner Relief Road (Regent Road/ Gore Street) (Manchester/Salford)
Broome and Ellingham Bypass (Norfolk)
A6002/A6007 Coventry Lane Improvement (Nottinghamshire)
A689 Sedgefield to Wynyard Improvement (Durham)
Semington to Melksham Improvement (Wiltshire)
Biddulph Inner Bypass (Staffordshire)*
Bridgwater Northern Distributor (Somerset)
Burntwood Bypass (Staffordshire)
Baldock Bypass (Hertfordshire)
Coalfields Link Road Phases 2 and 3 (Barnsley)
Scarborough Integrated Transport Scheme (North Yorkshire)
A53 Hodnet Bypass (Shropshire)
South Stockton Link (Stockton-on-Tees)
A6023 Denarby Main Diversion (Doncaster)

(ii) Still Provisionally Approved

A617 Mansfield Ashfield Regeneration Route (Nottinghamshire)
A507 Ridgmont Bypass and Woburn Link (Bedfordshire)
Bedford Western Bypass (Bedfordshire)
Stowmarket B1115 Relief Road (Suffolk)
A142 Fordham Bypass (Cambridgeshire)
A4146 Stoke Hammond and Linslade W. Bypass (Buckinghamshire)
Nar Ouse Regeneration Project (Norfolk)
South Lowestoft Relief Road (Suffolk)*
W. Thurrock Regeneration Ring Road (Thurrock)
A1073 Spalding to Eye Improvement (Lincolnshire/ Peterborough)
A607 Rearsby Bypass (Leicestershire/Leicester City)
Earl Shilton Bypass (Leicestershire)
A158/C541 Coastal Access Improvement (Lincolnshire)
Southern Radial Route (Sunderland)

Eastern Transport Corridor (Darlington)*
A688 Wheatley Hill to Bowburn Link (Durham)
A167 Chilton Bypass (Durham)
Scotswood Road Improvement (Tyne and Wear)
Carlisle Northern Development Route (Cumbria)*
Bridgefoot Environmental Enhancement (Warrington)
Glossop Spur (Tameside)
Hall Lane Area Improvement Scheme (Liverpool)*
East Kent Access Phase 1 (Kent)
Brunel Link and Harnham Relief Road (Wiltshire)
Barnstaple Western Bypass (Devon)*
NW Taunton Package (Somerset)
A39 Camelford Bypass (Cornwall)
Weymouth Relief Road (Dorset)*
Rugeley Bypass (Staffordshire)*
Hanley Bentilee Link (Stoke-On-Trent)*
Barford Bypass (Warwickshire)
Cradley Heath Town Centre (Sandwell)
Rugby Western Bypass (Warwickshire)
Northfield Regeneration Route (Birmingham)
Owen Street Relief Road (Sandwell)
Inner Relief Road—Stages 2 and 3 (Sheffield)*
Glasshoughton Coalfields Link Road (Wakefield)
A631 W. Bawtry Road Improvement (Rotherham)*
Hemsworth—Al Link Road (Wakefield)
A1198 Papworth Everard Bypass (Cambridgeshire)
Markham Employment Growth Zone (Derbyshire)*
East Corridor South (Luton)
A612 Gedling ITP Scheme (Nottinghamshire)
A34 Alderley Edge Bypass (Cheshire)*
A228 Main Road to Ropers Lane (Phase 1) (Medway)*
Bletchley Link (Milton Keynes)*
Junction 11 M4 Improvement Proposals (Reading)
Poole Bridge Regeneration Initiative (Poole)*
Selly Oak Relief Road (Birmingham)*
A628 Cudworth and West Green Bypass (Barnsley)*
Oakham Bypass (Rutland)*
A57(T) Ml Junction 31—Todwick Crossroads (Rotherham)
Pegswood Bypass (Northumberland)
A6096 Ilkeston Awsworth Link (Derbyshire)*
Kiln Lane Link (Surrey)*

In addition to the above schemes, the following schemes which were classified as "work In progress" by Ministers in the Transport Settlements between 1999 and 2001
are:

(i) Approved
None

(ii) Still Work In Progress (some have not been resubmitted in subsequent settlement rounds)
Inner Relief Road (Leeds)
Cadishead Way (Salford)
Integrated Transport Scheme (Wigan)
Roscommon Way Extension (Essex)
Northern Gateway Stage 2 (North Tyneside)
Central Route (Sunderland)
A24 Horsham Capel Improvement (W.Sussex)
Ashton Northern Bypass (Phase 2) (Tameside)
A36 Codford-Heytesbury Improvement (Wiltshire)
A350 Westbury Bypass (Wiltshire)
M6 Heysham Link Road (Lancashire)
Manchester Ship Canal Crossing (Warrington)
Newhaven Port Access Road (East Sussex)
E. Kent Access Phase 2 (Kent)
A228 Ropers Lane to Grain (Phase 2) (Medway)
A418 Wing Bypass (Buckinghamshire)
A33 Interchanges (Reading)
Wylye Valley Relief Road (Wiltshire)
A4 Bath Road—Callington Road Link (Bristol)
Westbury Bypass (Wiltshire)
Town Centre Transport Package (Walsall)
City Centre Link (Stoke-On-Trent)
A244 Cross Thames Transport Corridor (Surrey)
S. Humber Bank Link Road (Stage 2)
(N.E. Lincolnshire)
Birkenhead Town Link Diversion (Wirral)
Great Yarmouth A47/A149 Link Road (Norfolk)
N. Gateway Stage 3 (N. Tyneside)
Tunstall N. Bypass (Stoke-on-Trent)

School Transport

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what research has *(a)* been conducted and *(b)* is planned by his Department; and what research has been assessed by his Department on the steps needed to reduce the cost of starting up new home to school transport. [81732]

Mr. Jamieson: My Department has recently commissioned independent consultants to evaluate the American-style yellow school bus pilots which First is running and other innovative school bus schemes. The objectives of the evaluation include comparing the daily cost per capita to local authorities of running a First pilot vehicle to that of running a traditional school contract vehicle. The study is expected to report in August 2003 and we expect to issue a statement on the interim findings next month.

Mr. Don Foster : To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what research *(a)* has been conducted and *(b)* is planned by his Department on the implications on *(i)* road safety, (ii) congestion and (iii) pollution of changes in home to school transport which (A) have taken place, and (B) could arise from additional improvements in home to school transport. [81736]

Mr. Jamieson: In March 2001 the then DTLR commissioned W. S. Atkins to assess what the effects would be of increasing the current provision of home-to-school transport. The study, which reported at the end of 2001, identified considerable interest in using home-to-school transport among households that were currently not entitled to free home to school transport. It concluded that relaxing the eligibility criteria would have a noticeable impact on car use. Copies of the report "Assessment of parental attitudes to and the potential take-up of additional home to school transport" are available in the Libraries of the House.

My Department has recently commissioned independent consultants to evaluate the American style yellow school bus pilots that First are running. The objectives of the evaluation include assessing how successful the pilots have been in reducing the number of journeys to school by car, comparing the safety

record of the First pilot vehicles with that of the vehicles traditionally used for school bus services and assessing their impact on other accident rates in the area. The study is expected to report in August 2003 and we expect to issue a statement on the interim findings next month.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State (1) for Transport what funding mechanisms are available directly from his Department to *(a)* local authorities and *(b)* other education bodies for improving school transport in order to *(i)* improve road safety, (ii) tackle congestion and (iii) tackle pollution; [81737]

(2) what funding mechanisms have been available directly from his Department to *(a)* local authorities and *(b)* other education bodies for improving school transport in each year since 1992. [81738]

Mr. Jamieson: My Department does not provide specific funding for school transport. Responsibility for the provision of statutory home to school transport lies with the Department for Education and Skills.

However, as part of their Local Transport Plan strategies, whose objectives must include the improvement of safety, the promotion of accessibility and the protection of the environment, local authorities in England can propose strategies to provide support for and improve school transport provision. They may also take advantage of the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) funding route. An example of the latter is Surrey County Council's (Pegasus) School Bus Scheme for which my Department announced 16 million in PFI credits, which will be paid through supporting special grant, in December 2002.

Local authorities are able to fund bus services that would not otherwise be provided from their Revenue Support Grant; in some cases these will be on routes that serve schools. They may also bid for funding for innovative road passenger transport schemes, which may include school transport services, under the Rural and Urban Bus Challenge schemes.

Speed Limits

Mr. Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what plans he has to reduce speed limits in urban areas; and if he will make a statement. [80886]

Mr. Jamieson: Legislation is already in place that allows local authorities to introduce 20 mph zones and 20 mph speed limits. Traffic calmed 20 mph zones have been particularly successful as they ensure compliance with the speed limit thereby substantially reducing the risk of accidents.

Dr. Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what guidance exists for the erection of 30mph repeaters in lit streets. [80621]

Mr. Jamieson: None. The use of repeaters on 30mph lit roads (restricted roads) is strictly prohibited.

Strategic Rail Authority

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport to whom the *(a)* Chairman and Chief Executive of the Strategic Rail Authority, *(b)* Directors of the Strategic Rail Authority and *(c)* Organisation of the Strategic Rail Authority are accountable; what actions are required in each case to report on their delivery and performance; what requirements are placed on each by his Department in terms of delivery and performance; and what actions his Department can take where delivery and performance targets are not being met. [81741]

Mr. Jamieson: The chair and members of the Strategic Rail Authority are appointed by Ministers and collectively responsible to the Secretary of State for the overall performance of the Authority.

They are required to operate within the bounds of statute and in accordance with any directions and guidance from the Secretary of State issued under sections 206(3) and 207(5) of the Transport Act 2000. The authority must also comply with a statutory financial framework and its management statement. Copies of these documents are available in the House Library.

The management of the authority, within this framework, is a matter for the chair, chief executive and members. The authority reports on its performance in its annual report, which is laid before the House in accordance with section 75 of the Railways Act 1993.

Traffic Lights

Mr. Redwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many traffic lights in London have been replaced in the last two years. [81245]

Mr. Spellar: Traffic lights in London are the responsibility of the Mayor and Transport for London (TfL). Further information can be obtained from:

Jim Landles
Assistant Director of Traffic Technology Services
TfL Street Management
Windsor House
42–50 Victoria Street
London SW1HOTL

TREASURY

Bankers (Northern Ireland) Act

Rev. Martin Smyth: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what general or special licences have been issued under section 2 of the Bankers (Northern Ireland) Act 1928 in the past five years. [80721]

Ruth Kelly *[holding answer 18 November 2002]:* None.

Budget Projections

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the reasons for the difference between the Budget projections of 2001–02 and the projection based on actual receipts in 2002–03 to 30 September 2002 for *(a)* income and capital gains taxes, *(b)* corporation tax and *(c)* stamp duties. [82284]

Ruth Kelly: Consistent with the Code for Fiscal Stability, an interim update of projections for tax receipts will be published in the forthcoming pre-Budget Report.

Company Cars

Ms Atherton: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the use of fuel-efficient company cars following changes to the taxation of company cars introduced on 1 April; what steps have been taken to encourage employers to consult employees on company policy following the changes; and what evidence he has reviewed of the change in the number of vehicles of commercial vehicle status purchased by companies since 1 April. [81664]

John Healey: The Inland Revenue has begun an extensive evaluation programme to look at the effects of the company car tax reforms introduced in April this year. Results of the evaluation are not yet available.

The changes have been widely publicised.

Financial Services Authority

Mr. Donaldson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, what action is being taken by the Financial Services Authority to address the problems caused by the collapse of the professional indemnity insurance market for independent financial advisers in the United Kingdom. [80675]

Ruth Kelly: This is a matter for the FSA. I understand that in a press statement on 29 October 2002, the FSA announced technical changes to its rulebook regarding professional indemnity insurance. The FSA has explained that it introduced these new, temporary measures to increase capacity in the market for professional indemnity insurance.

Fire Service

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions his Department has had with the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister regarding funding sources for a possible increase in firefighters' pay. [81791]

Ruth Kelly: Deployment of the departmental expenditure limit (DEL) of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister is a matter for the Deputy Prime Minister. The Treasury is in regular contact with the office on a range of financial issues.

Firefighters' Dispute

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the cost of a national firefighters' strike to the UK economy per day. [81790]

Ruth Kelly: Estimated costs to the UK economy of fires were set out in Home Office Research Study 229 (October 2001) entitled "The economic costs of fire". It is not possible to reliably estimate in advance the costs to the UK economy of a firefighters' strike given the number of factors involved, including the different capacity offered by emergency cover arrangements compared with the normal fire service.

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer, how much an *(a)* 11 per cent., and *(b)* 40 per cent., increase in firelighters' pay would cost HM Treasury over the next five years. [81789]

Ruth Kelly: Estimated spending on fire services (the Fire Standard Spending Assessment) is set out in the Government's White Paper: "2002 Spending Review: New Public Spending Plans 2003–2006", published in July 2002. Actual spending on fire services, including pay, is determined by fire authorities and will include an element derived from local taxation.

London Underground

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what discussions his Department has had with representatives of Amey concerning the delayed public-private partnership of London underground; and if he will make a statement. [81787]

Ruth Kelly: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer given by the Chancellor of the Exchequer on 11 February 2002, *Official Report*, columns 114W-15W.

Military Action Costs (Middle East)

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made regarding the cost to HM Treasury of military action in the Middle East; and what discussions his Department has had with the Ministry of Defence about action as a result of the UN resolution against Iraq. [81802]

Ruth Kelly: Officials of HM Treasury and the Ministry of Defence routinely discuss potential contingencies. The cost of any UK contribution to military action would depend on a number of factors, including the scale of the UK contribution and the duration of military action. No decisions have, however, been taken to commit UK Armed Forces to new military action in the Middle East. Military action is neither imminent nor inevitable, and will not be necessary if Iraq chooses to comply fully with UNSCR1441.

National Air Traffic Services

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the cost of a national air traffic controllers' strike to the UK economy. [81806]

Ruth Kelly: No such assessment has been made.

National Minimum Wage

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will publish the research his Department undertook before deciding on the level of the national minimum wage; [81805]

(2) what recent representations he has received from *(a)* trade unions, *(b)* industry and *(c)* other interested parties regarding the level of the national minimum wage. [81803]

Alan Johnson: I have been asked to reply.

When setting the level of the national minimum wage the Government take account of the recommendations of the independent Low Pay Commission. The commission has recently consulted widely as part of the process of preparing its fourth report on the minimum wage and industry, trade unions and other interested parties will have made representations to them, although we have received copies of these from only a

small number of respondents. The Government submitted their evidence to the commission earlier this month and a copy of this has been placed on my Department's website at www.dti.gov.uk. We expect the commission to present the fourth report to the Government in February 2003.

Network Rail

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make a statement on the Government's interests in Network Rail, taking into account the UK accounting principles. [81809]

Ruth Kelly: The Government does not have an equity stake in Network Rail nor does it control the company's governing board. Government has made certain credit facilities available to the company. UK accounting principles includes both Generally Accepted Accounting Practice (GAAP) used to prepare company accounts, and the European System of Accounts (ESA95) used by the Office for National Statistics for the compilation of economic statistics. Sir John Bourne (the Comptroller and Auditor General) and Len Cook (the National Statistician) made a joint statement on 24 October on how these accounting rules affect Network Rail. This is available on the ONS and NAO web sites.

Office for National Statistics

Matthew Taylor: To ask Mr Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will list the data series produced by National Statistics to which Ministers in his Department have had privileged access prior to publication since May 1997; and if he will make a statement. [80413]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Len Cook to Mr Taylor, dated 21 November 2002:

As National Statistician I have been asked to reply to your recent question concerning data series produced by National Statistics to which Ministers have had privileged access prior to publication since May 1997. (80413)

Historical information is not held centrally. Treasury Ministers currently receive pre-release access to the following statistics released by the Office for National Statistics:

2001 Census Statistics—first release
Balance of Payments First Release
Business Enterprise R&D
Business Investment
Consumer Prices Index
Environmental Accounts in Blue Book
Foreign Direct Investment
GDP Preliminary First Release
Government Debt Under Maastricht
Gross Domestic Expenditure on R&D
Health Statistics Quarterly
Index of Distribution
Index of Production
Investment by Insurance Companies
Labour Market Statistics (UK and Regional)—First Release
Life Expectancy [by sub-national geographies and socio-economic classifications] Low Pay Estimates
Motor Vehicles Production
New Earnings Survey
Outcome Income and Expenditure
Overseas Travel and Tourism
Pilot UK Health Accounts
Population Trends
Producer Prices Index
Productivity
national
Profitability of UK Companies
Public Sector Accounts
Public Sector Finance
Regional Accounts
Quarterly National Accounts
Retail Sales Index
Social Trends
The effect of taxes and benefits on household income
UK Trade

Pensions Dividend Tax

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the effects of Government policy on pensions dividend tax in relation to the value of stocks and shares listed on the *(a)* FTSE 100 share index and *(b)* FTSE 250 share index. [81783]

Ruth Kelly: The Government ended the payment of dividend tax credits to pension providers and other tax-exempt investors in order to encourage companies to retain more of their profits for investment and long-term growth. Over time, this measure will help to enhance the value of stocks and shares in listed companies.

Public Finance Initiative

Matthew Taylor: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer on what date the revised accounting treatment for PFI transactions will be recorded in the government accounts; and if he will make a statement. [80126]

Ruth Kelly: The government's policy when accounting for PFI contracts is to follow Generally Accepted Accounting Practice (GAAP). In particular, Application Note F to Financial Reporting Standard 5—Private Finance Initiatives and Similar Contract complemented by the Treasury Taskforce Technical Note No.1 (Revised) How to Account for PFI Transactions.

The guidance requires that PFI projects are recorded in accounts in the year the project becomes operational.

Public Service Agreements

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to introduce external auditing of PSAs; and if he will make a statement. [80588]

Ruth Kelly: The Government announced in its response to Lord Sharman's report on Audit and Accountability in Central Government that it has invited the Comptroller & Auditor General to take responsibility, under his existing powers, for the validation of systems used in reporting on PSA targets where measurement of performance depends upon data.

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to publish statistics this autumn to fulfil his pledge in the 2002 Budget to publish bi-annual reports of departmental progress against public service agreement targets. [80590]

Ruth Kelly: Updates of progress against public service agreement targets will shortly be published by departments in their autumn performance reports.

Public-private Partnerships and PFI

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) whether his Department is reviewing the use of the Private Finance Initiative and public-private partnerships; and if he will make a statement; [81812]

(2) what plans he has to review the bidding process for public-private partnerships. [81785]

Ruth Kelly: The Government keep all aspects of procurement policy under review in order to ensure that high quality public services are delivered on the basis of value for money.

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much of the off-balance-sheet borrowings funding projects on the Private Finance Initiative and public private-partnerships are *(a)* fully guaranteed and *(b)* effectively guaranteed. [81813]

Ruth Kelly: A full guarantee is in place in relation to the bonds issued by London and Continental Railways for the development of the Channel Tunnel Rail Link. This represents a contingent liability of £3.75 billion and has been laid before the House.

No borrowings related to PFI and PPP are effectively guaranteed.

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many letters of comfort his Department has issued in association with the public private-partnership financing scheme. [81814]

Ruth Kelly: Details of all letters of comfort which fall within the definition of a reportable non-statutory liability in Chapter 26 of "Government Accounting" have been provided in minutes laid before the House of Commons. The exceptions are those cases where commercial confidentiality has required that they be reported in confidence in writing to the Chair of Public Accounts Committee.

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what checks and balances are in place to ensure that investment through public-private partnership and Public Finance Initiative offers value for money for the Government. [81815]

Ruth Kelly: This Government only uses PFI where there is a clear value for money case to do so. Specific procurement decisions are a matter for individual Departments concerned.

Mr. Flight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will make a statement on the Government's system for accounting for public-private partnerships and the Private Finance Initiative; [81811]

(2) if he will make a statement on the Government's liabilities, including those under PFI. [81807]

Ruth Kelly: All Government liabilities are disclosed on the basis of openness and transparency. Independent auditors determine the accounting treatment for PFI and public-private partnership projects. The Government record all future PFI obligations in the Budget Red Book and reports to Parliament any contingent liabilities over £100,000.

Suicide

Mr. Paul Marsden: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people committed suicide in each year since 1992. [82693]

Ruth Kelly: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the National Statistician. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from L. Cook to Mr. P. Marsden, dated 21 November 2002:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your recent question concerning how many people have committed suicide in each year since 1992. (82693)

The most recent available mortality data are for the calendar year 2001. Figures for each year from 1992 to 2001 are given in the table below.

Number of deaths from suicide and injury undetermined whether accidentally or purposely inflicted[1], persons, England and Wales, 1992 to 2001[2]

Calendar year	Number of deaths
1992	5,486
1993	5,251
1994	5.144
1995	5.157
1996	4,893
1997	4.981
1998	5,154
1999	5,188
2000	4,922
2001	4,699

[1] The cause of death was defined using the International Classification of Diseases, Ninth Revision (ICD-9) codes E950-E959 and E980-E989 excluding E988.8 for the years 1992 to 2000, and, for the year 2001, the International Classification of Diseases, Tenth Revision (ICD-10) codes X60-X84 and Y10-Y34 excluding Y33.9 where the Coroner's verdict was pending.
[2] Figures are for deaths registered in 1992 and for deaths occurring in each calendar year from 1993 to 2001.

Terrorist Funds

Mr. Wray: To ask Mr Chancellor of the Exchequer what progress has been made in co-operating with other European Treasury Departments in neutralising terrorist funds. [81063]

Ruth Kelly: As made clear in the recent joint Treasury/ Home Office report "Combating the Financing of Terrorism: A Report on UK action", many of the measures to target, disrupt and cut off terrorist financing are taken at international level. The Treasury works in close cooperation with its European counterparts and others, including the financial services industry, to ensure the effectiveness of these measures in the fight against terrorism. EC Regulations have been introduced which require all EU members to freeze the assets of terrorists and those listed by the UN Sanctions Committee as associated with bin Laden, Al Qa'ida and the Taliban.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Annuities

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what proportion of annuitants had annuitised over £100,000 of pensions savings in each of the last five years; and if he will estimate what the effect on annuity rates would be were the excess over £100,000 not annuitised. [82063]

Mr. McCartney: Estimates taken from data collected by the Association of British Insurers show that around 3 per cent. of pension funds used to purchase annuities in 2001 were £100,000 or larger.

Figures for earlier years are not available.

No assessment has been made of what the effect on annuity rates would be if people were not required to annuitise that proportion of their pension fund in excess of £100,000. The Government believes that, once any tax-free lump sum has been taken, the remaining funds built up in a pension fund should be used to provide an income in retirement.

Benefits

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how much was spent on *(a)* contributory and *(b)* non-contributory benefits in the last 12 months. [82062]

Malcolm Wicks: Data on total expenditure on contributory and non-contributory benefits is included in the Department for Work and Pensions consolidated resource account.

Data on contributory and non-contributory benefits for 2000–01 was included in the Department of Social Security consolidated resource account published on 31 January 2002 (HC 491). The 2001–02 resource account is scheduled to be published on 31 January 2003.

Post Office Card Account

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what consultations have been carried out with benefit recipients on the advantages and disadvantages of *(a)* the basic bank account and *(b)* the Post Office card account. [82165]

Malcolm Wicks: We have discussed the changes widely with interested groups, who have been given an opportunity to comment on the information materials that will be issued to our customers. Our information campaign will take customers through the changes. Customers will be supplied with information which clearly sets out their account options (including the key features of each type of account) and enables them to decide which account best meets their needs and circumstances.

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the cost per transaction will be of paying *(a)* the basic state pension and *(b)* child benefit through *(i)* the basic bank account and (ii) the Post Office card account. [82166]

Malcolm Wicks: The cost of making payments to the Post Office card account is less than 1p, as it is for basic bank accounts, however the Government pays additional costs to the Post Office for the provision of the Post Office card account services. These costs remain commercial in confidence.

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what estimate he has made of *(a)* the likely take-up of the Post Office card account and *(b)* the cost to the Department thereof. [82170]

Malcolm Wicks: There is operating assumption that three million card accounts will be opened. The cost will depend on take-up which is itself dependent on a variety of factors including the numbers of benefit, pension and tax credit customers and the choices that customers make between different types of accounts.

SERPS

Mr. Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions to how many recipients of his initial letter regarding changes to the rules regarding inherited SERPs he plans to send a further letter of clarification following the referral of one such letter to the Parliamentary Ombudsman. [82277]

Mr. McCartney: Officials are currently finalising detailed plans in response to the Parliamentary Ombudsman's findings. However, we expect to be writing to around 500,000 individuals to offer further clarification of their SERPS position.

The background to this is that the Pension Service has sent out 5.1 million letters to people who will reach state pension age between 6 October 2002 and 5October 2010. This letter informed them of the changes to the rules regarding the inheritance of SERPS announced to the House by my predecessor on 29 November 2000 and subsequently approved by Parliament in March 2001.

This letter gave people the option of requesting a SERPS estimate, and by 16 November some 1,248,104 estimates had been requested.

This follow-up estimate letter was the subject of exhaustive drafting and an approval process that included the Social Security Advisory Committee (SSAC) and outside bodies. One key complexity was around how to explain SERPS and its interaction with Contracted Out Deductions (COD).

However, it has come our attention that some people may have possibly misunderstood the estimate despite the caveat in the letter. This group may believe that they stand to receive their full SERPS without appreciating that if they have contracted out, their SERPS will be lower because of their occupational or private pension scheme.

We have therefore decided that officials should write again to all those people who have received an estimate letter and have some COD deductions except people who will reach pension age between now and 5 July 2003-they will get pre-retirement pensions claim material including full personal details of their new final entitlement.

In addition we will continue the provision of the very successful Contact Centre, incorporating a helpline which has already dealt with in excess of 270,000 phone calls and 1.5 million pieces of post.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Nappies

17. **Dr. Naysmith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps her Department is taking to encourage families, nurseries and hospitals to switch to traditional cotton nappies. [81222]

Mr. Meacher: A growing number of councils are promoting the use of re-usable nappies. For instance, both West Sussex and Oxfordshire provide subsidies for parents who use re-usable nappies. A number of councils also take part in awareness-raising initiatives.

Grants have also been made from Defra's £140 million Waste Minimisation and Recycling Fund to councils promoting waste minimisation to their communities. A project aimed at increasing the use of re-usable nappies is among these, and a number will include nappies as part of their programmes.

Combined Heat and Power

18. **Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what measures she proposes to maximise the potential development for combined heat and power plants. [81224]

Mr. Meacher: The Department recently consulted on a draft CHP Strategy that sets out the measures thought sufficient to achieve the CHP target of at least 10,000 mega watts of good quality CHP by 2010. The Government are currently developing an Energy White Paper that aims to set out future energy policy to and beyond 2010. This will include consideration of CHP.

Pig Industry

19. **Mr. Bacon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement about the pig industry scheme for Outgoers. [81225]

Mr. Morley: The Outgoers element of the Pig Industry Restructuring Scheme (PIRS), which was introduced as part of the Action Plan for Farming, and is now closed to applications, provided assistance of £15.6 million in 2001 to pig farmers seeking to leave the industry. Under the Ongoers element, £10.9 million was offered this year and next to producers who wished to restructure their businesses to become more viable in the long term.

Agrimonetary Compensation

21. **Sir Robert Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what discussions she has had with her European Union counterparts on a succession scheme to agrimonetary compensation. [81227]

Alun Michael: My right hon. Friend, the Secretary of State, has had no discussions with European Union counterparts on a successor scheme to agrimonetary compensation.

EC Fisheries Council Meeting

22. **Annabelle Ewing:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs who will head the UK delegation at the next EC Fisheries Council Meeting. [81228]

Mr. Morley: EU negotiations are a reserved matter as laid out in the terms of the devolution settlement, and Defra is the lead Department. UK negotiating positions are agreed with the involvement of devolved administrations.

Corporate Environmental Reporting

23. **Sue Doughty:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps her Department has taken to encourage corporate environmental reporting. [81229]

Mr. Meacher: We have produced a series of guidelines to help companies measure and report their environmental performance, including general guidelines published last year, and more specific guidance on reporting the key impacts of greenhouse gas emissions, waste and water. The general guidelines were endorsed by the CBI and sent to approximately 3,000 of their members, and to all of the leading FTSE 350 listed companies.

We have written this year to companies in the FTSE 350, asking them what they had done to respond to the Prime Minister's challenge to report on their environmental performance. A list of the results was placed in the Library of the House in July.

We have also been working with the Department for Trade and Industry on plans for some important new reporting provisions, set out in the White Paper on Modernising Company Law, published this summer. These would require approximately 1,000 of the most economically significant companies to include information on environmental, social and community issues relevant to the company's business in a new Operating and Financial Review. We are supporting the Department of Trade and Industry in establishing an independent group of experts to help develop guidance on how directors should assess whether an item is material to their company and would therefore have to be included in its OFR. The membership of the group will be announced shortly.

Bovine TB

24. **Mr. Clifton-Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the Government's strategy for combating bovine TB. [81230]

Mr. Morley: Bovine TB in cattle is one of the most difficult animal health problems being faced, and the increase in its incidence is continuing to give considerable concern. The Government are keen to

tackle the problem and have implemented a wide-ranging strategy at a cost of £35 to £40 million a year. Action is centred around a five-point strategy as follows:

protecting human health;

developing a TB vaccine;

carrying out research into bovine TB;

testing cattle for TB and putting controls in place; and

the randomised badger culling field trial.

The strategy is kept under review by officials. Some elements of the overarching bovine TB strategy will not produce results in the immediate future, e.g. the badger culling trial and development of a TB vaccine. We are therefore exploring and, where appropriate, implementing interim measures to help control bovine TB, while taking account of the affects of disease control measures on farmers.

A package of measures was announced in early October. This introduced:

the licensed movement off farm of non-reactor cattle in certain specified circumstances;

the imposition of movement restrictions on herds with overdue tests;

a pilot project to assess the effectiveness of the gamma interferon blood test in detecting bovine TB; and

the establishment of an industry group to monitor progress in implementing the new measures.

Defra is currently considering how to manage the risk from movement of animals onto herds affected by bovine TB. An announcement will be made shortly.

Recycling (Inner London Boroughs)

25. **Jeremy Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what action the Government are taking to increase the level of recycling in waste by boroughs in inner London. [81231]

Mr. Meacher: The Government have set statutory performance standards under the Best Value regime so that authorities must, on average, double their 1998–99 recycling rate by 2003–04 and triple their 1998–99 rates by 2005–06.

We are providing funding to assist. Primarily, this is through additional revenue support grant, which all local authorities receive. This year the EPCS block, which includes funding for waste, will be £1.1 billion over baseline in 2000–01. In addition, we have put in place a waste minimisation and recycling fund challenge fund totalling £140 million over the two years 2002–03 and 2003–04. In London, we allocated £21 million of this challenge fund to a partnership between the Mayor of London, the Association of London Government, the GLA and London Waste Action. That partnership is allocating the funding to various recycling initiatives in London boroughs.

Illegal waste

26. **Sir Sydney Chapman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on progress in the Environment Agency's role in tackling the dumping of illegal waste. [81232]

Mr. Meacher: The Environment Agency has purchased £120,000 worth of surveillance equipment that may be used in covert surveillance operations to identify fly-tippers attempting illegally to dump waste. This equipment has been distributed to all of the agency's regions for use in both the agency's Tyre Watch campaign to detect illegal dumping of waste tyres and to counter fly-tipping generally. The agency is working with local authorities to deploy such equipment at relevant sites and investigations made using this equipment will lead to prosecutions for those caught.

The agency is also working closely with the Fly-tipping Stakeholder's Forum representing farmers, landowners, local authorities and others with the common aim of combating fly-tipping, better to establish the scale of fly-tipping and to develop measures to detect and prevent it.

The agency investigated some 3,800 incidents in 2001–02 to ensure protection of the environment and has prosecuted a number of fly-tippers. In 2001–02, the agency won 132 successful prosecutions against fly-tippers.

Air Pollution

27. **Sir Teddy Taylor:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affiars if she will make a statement on the changes in the levels of air pollution in large cities over the past five years. [81233]

Alun Michael: In general, levels of air pollution in large cities in the UK have reduced over the past five years, largely as a result of reductions in road transport emissions brought about by tighter specifications for new vehicles and fuels. The average number of days of moderate or higher air pollution at air monitoring sites in urban areas reduced from 48 days in 1996 to 21 days in 2001.

Doorstep Recycling

28. **Tim Loughton:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what help she is giving to local authorities to improve doorstep recycling [81234]

Mr. Meacher: Individual local authorities are in a position to decide how best to meet the requirements we have put in place to increase recycling, taking into account local circumstances.

However, we are providing additional funding to improve recycling rates, both through additional revenue support grant distributed to local authorities by formula and through a waste minimisation and recycling fund totalling £140 million over the two years 2002–03 and 2003–04. The latter is a challenge fund.

Under the allocations from that fund outside London for 2002–03, we supported 112 schemes, more than 30 of which involved additional kerbside collection outside London.

Waste Collection

29. **Joan Ruddock:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what plans she has to amend the Environmental Protection (Duty of Care) Regulations 1991. [81235]

Mr. Meacher: We propose to amend the Environmental Protection (Duty of Care) Regulations 1991 to allow waste collection authorities to serve notice on businesses, which will allow the authority to see their duty of care waste transfer notes. This should mean better enforcement of the duty of care requirements. The amended regulations should be laid before the House shortly.

Pesticides

30. **Mr. Simon Thomas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on the Voluntary Initiative on pesticides use. [81236]

Mr. Morley: The Government are committed to reducing the environmental impacts of pesticides. To this end, the Government have invited industry to implement a package of measures, under the badge of the "Voluntary Initiative". These measures are designed to deliver real environmental benefits over a five year period, commencing in April 2001.

The Government are closely monitoring progress on implementing the Voluntary Initiative. The Government hope that the initiative will produce results and urge farmers, growers and their advisers and suppliers to give it their full support. If the Voluntary Initiative does not produce tangible environmental benefits, the Government will need to take other action. One option would be a pesticides tax, which the Government believe could be a useful tool in conjunction with other measures.

Mr. Roger Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many food samples by type were tested for pesticide and other residues in each of the last 10 years. [81585]

Mr. Morley: The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra) conducts an annual pesticide residues surveillance programme for fruit and vegetables and other produce. This programme is now overseen by the independent Pesticide Residues Committee (PRC).

The number of samples tested in each of the last 10 years is indicated in the table.

Year	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*	*2002 planned*
Number of samples tested	3,371	3,742	3,230	3,449	2,648	2,187	2,374	2,304	4,003	4,000

The surveys cover fruit and vegetables, cereal products, animal products and miscellaneous items such as bottled water or composite foods like baby foods. But otherwise, the commodities tested vary from year to year. Samples of both imported and UK origin produce are tested. The 2001 survey generated results for over 130,000 pesticide commodity combinations.

The detailed results of the PRC's monitoring (and its predecessor the Working Party on Pesticide Residues (WPPR)) (including the commodities tested) have been published and can be viewed on the relevant websites:
www.pesticides.gov.uk/committees/PRC/prc.htm (PRC results)
www.pesticides.gov.uk/committees/WPPR/wppr.htm (WPPR results)

These electronic results go back as far as 1996. Hard copies going back to 1992 are available in the House Library.

The Department is also responsible for surveillance for veterinary residues. The Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VMD) of Defra runs two surveillance schemes that look for residues of authorised veterinary medicines and banned substances. In total, over 35,000 samples are collected per annum. All of the results are published quarterly in the VMD's newsletter and annually since 1996 in a report on surveillance and previously in the VMD's Annual Report and Accounts. Copies of the Annual Reports are available in the House Library or the VMD's website www.vmd.gov.uk.

The main, statutory, scheme collects samples from farms and abattoirs from throughout the UK and covers: red meat, poultry, farmed fish, eggs, farmed and wild game, milk and honey.

The second scheme complements the statutory scheme and concentrates on raw imported produce and samples of popular processed foods collected from shops.

The two surveillance schemes are subject to independent scrutiny from the Veterinary Residues Committee, which was established in January 2001. Prior to that, the Advisory Group on Veterinary Residues oversaw the work.

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has responsibility for pesticide residues and veterinary residues. Other food residues are a matter for the Food Standards Agency, who also takes the lead in monitoring food products for environmental contaminants.

Landfill Directive

31. **Andrew Bennett:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what progress is being made by the UK in meeting the EU Landfill Directive. [81237]

Mr. Meacher: The Waste and Emissions Trading Bill was introduced in the House of Lords on 14 November. This will set the framework for achieving the targets on municipal biodegradable waste in Article 5(1) and (2) of the Directive to be met by the United Kingdom. For England and Wales, other aspects of the Directive were covered in The Landfill (England and Wales) Regulations 2002 (S.I. 2002 no. 1559).

Foot and Mouth

32. **Huw Irranca-Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, if she will make a statement on her policy on vaccinating against foot and mouth disease. [81238]

Mr. Morley: The Government's policy is set out in their Response to the Reports of the Foot and Mouth Disease Inquiries (Cm 5637), published on 6 November. Section 4.3 in particular deals with vaccination.

Brassenthwaite Lake

33. **Tony Cunningham:** Tony Cunningham (Workington): To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what plans the Evironment Agency has to deal with the environmental problems suffered by Brassenthwaite Lake [81239]

Mr. Morley: The main environmental problem suffered by Bassenthwaite Lake is eutrophication caused by an increase in nutrient levels, specifically phosphorous, due primarily to diffuse pollution and discharges from waste water treatment works.

Nutrient enrichment of Bassenthwaite Lake will be addressed within the framework of the Environments Agency's national strategy (set out in an Agency publication entitled "Aquatic Eutrophication in England and Wales—A Management Strategy") and through a more targeted Bassenthwaite Lake Restoration Programme that is currently being developed.

Two initiatives currently under way are:

the use of the Agency's regulatory powers to reduce the discharge of phosphorous from Keswick waste water treatment works. The introduction of phosphorous stripping in 1996 has lead to a significant reduction in the amount of phosphorous being discharged to the lake. Additional upgrades to the treatment works planned for 2004 will further reduce phosphate discharges. The Environment Agency will consider what other enhancements are required to waste water treatment works within the Bassenthwaite catchment for the water utilities Asset Management Process period 2005 to 2010;

the promotion of the Still Waters partnership within the catchment to promote solutions to nutrient enrichment caused by diffuse pollution that are beyond the remit of any one regulatory body or party. Since land use and land management practices are the primary cause of diffuse phosphorous entering Bassenthwaite Lake and diffuse sources are the biggest contributors of phosphorus pollution in the lake, the Still Waters partnership will focus on ways and means of reducing such inputs.

Fishing Industry (Scotland)

34. **Mr. Weir:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what recent discussions she has had with the Scottish Executive regarding the fishing industry in Scotland. [81240]

Mr. Morley: I always discuss fishing issues affecting all parts of the United Kingdom with the Scottish Minister for Environment and Rural Development, in preparation for meetings of the EU Council of Ministers, and often in between Council meetings as well. There is constant contact between fisheries officials from Defra and their opposite numbers in the Scottish Executive.

Vehicle Registration and Licensing Procedures

35. **Mrs. Brooke:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will make a statement on what steps have been taken and are planned to tackle the problem of abandoned cars. [81241]

Mr. Meacher: In October 2001 we published a consultation document on measures to remove abandoned and untaxed vehicles from the streets more quickly and, for the longer term, bring forward changes to vehicle registration and licensing procedures to ensure greater accuracy of DVLA's vehicle record.

Regulations reducing the statutory notice periods after which local authorities can remove abandoned vehicles from the highway and the storage periods for unlicensed vehicles came into force on 9 April. Local authorities can now remove those vehicles that they consider merit destruction from the highway after the expiry of a 24 hour notice placed on them.

We have supported pilot schemes in the London boroughs of Newham and Lewisham in which the local authority was given DVLA's powers to wheelclamp and remove unlicensed vehicles after 24 hours. Following the success of the Newham pilot on 19 April, we announced that all councils who wished could operate in the same way.

In addition, councils have targeted over 6,000 abandoned unlicensed vehicles in multi-Agency "Operation Cubits" with over 4,000 vehicles crushed and more operations are planned. To date we estimate that the operations have induced more than 15,000 motorists to relicense voluntarily bringing in over £2.3 million in additional revenue.

The Government are currently developing proposals for the reform and modernisation of vehicle registration and licensing, to reduce evasion and to bear down on vehicle crime. In response to the recommendations of a report commissioned by the Department for Transport from the Jill Dando Institute of Crime Science DfT have established a Modernising Vehicle Registration Implementation Board (MVRIB). This includes representatives of motorists' organisations, the motor trade, the police and the insurance industry to advise on and develop those proposals.

The 2002 Finance Act contained provisions under which the responsibility for licensing and taxing vehicles will be placed on the registered keeper, who will remain liable for doing so until such time that the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) has properly been notified of a change of keeper. These proposals will also mean that it is not necessary for a vehicle to be detected on the road for effective enforcement action to take place. The implementation of these new powers is at the heart of MVRIB's agenda.

Collection of Flood Event Data

36. **Dr. John Pugh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, what steps her Department is taking to improve the collation of flood return statistics. [81242]

Mr. Morley: The Environment Agency has established and implemented systems and procedures in all of its regions and areas covering England and Wales

for the collection of flood event data during and after flooding. Flood and hydrometric data is collected from instrumentation (rain gauges, river level and flow recorders, tide gauges, wave buoys) and by using techniques such as aerial/remote sensing, land survey, on-site monitoring and post-event questionnaires.

A project led by the Environment Agency (funded by DEFRA) in collaboration with the Scottish Environment Protection Agency and the Rivers Agency of the Department of Agriculture and Rural Development, Northern Ireland, is being carried out to improve the capture and archiving of flood flows at river gauging stations in the UK. Known as "HIFLOWS-UK", the main aim of the project is to extend and improve the data available for flood estimation primarily using Flood Estimation Handbook methods, and to develop a single authoritative UK dataset. The project also aims to make the data widely available and easily accessible via the Internet, and to establish structures and procedures for future updating and dissemination. The project is due to complete in March 2004.

Work started in 2002 to improve accessibility to sea level data. Proudman Oceanographic Laboratory (POL) who manage the UK Tide Gauge Network for DEFRA and the Scottish Executive are being given extra funding from DEFRA to collate a new data base of tide data over the last 30 years and make it available on CD. In addition recent historic data from the network is now freely available from the POL web site. In September 2002 DEFRA installed the first of two of a network of six near-shore wave recording gauges which, together with data from existing offshore wave gauges run by the Met Office, will be collated to form the first long term archive of wave data for England and Wales. Data from the archive will be freely available on the CEFAS web sitewho are managing the network for DEFRA.

In the South-East of England a new £8.2 million pilot project has been established by the Agency in partnership with all the maritime authorities (via the coastal groups) for the strategic regional coastal monitoring of the shoreline form and coastal processes (including wind, waves and tides). This project has been supported and grant-aided by DEFRA, and similar projects are likely to be established in other regions of England and Wales.

In all cases, collating date and making it freely available facilitates the user community who undertake statistical analysis including flood frequency analysis for many purposes.

Ivory

Mr. Desmond Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what action she is taking to prevent trade in ivory products; and if she will make a statement. [80885]

Mr. Morley: Under EU CITES Regulations, commercial trade in ivory products, including internal sales is prohibited. The only exception relates to worked items acquired before 1 June 1947. The recent CITES decision to allow a one-off sale of limited ivory stocks after May 2004, subject to strict conditions, will not affect the EU's current position on trade in ivory.

Arable Farmers

Mr. Alan Hurst: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what proposals she has to ensure fair competition for British arable farmers in the international grain trade. [80481]

Mr. Morley: The terms of competition for UK farmers in the international grain trade are governed by the relevant provisions of the EU's common market organisation for cereals and the wider WTO framework. The Government's objective is to ensure that these are as fair and open as possible.

Cattle

Mr. Desmond Swayne: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimate she has made of the losses incurred by farmers as a consequence of the disappearance of cattle passport tear-off slips; and if she will make a statement. [80823]

Alun Michael: The Rural Payments Agency (RPA) is currently reviewing the results of cross checks which it has carried out between the bovine subsidy claims made by farmers and the Cattle Tracing System (CTS) maintained by the British Cattle Movement Service (BCMS). No reliable estimate can be made of the sums which may be withheld or applied by way of penalties until the review is complete Penalties will apply only where the RPA is satisfied that the claimants have failed to meet their obligation to ensure that details of their animals are properly registered on the CTS.

Fallen Livestock

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) what assessment she has made of the collection of fallen livestock for disposal and its relationship with existing livestock movement regulations; and if she will make a statement. [81160]

(2) what assessment she has made of the relationship between fallen livestock and hunts; and if she will make a statement. [81158]

(3) what assessment she has made of the impact of the use of incinerators for dealing with fallen livestock; and if she will make a statement. [81162]

(4) how many fallen livestock there have been in each of the last 10 years, broken down by region. [81161]

(5) what plans she has to provide financial support for the disposal of fallen livestock from 2003; and if she will make a statement. [81159]

Mr. Morley: *[holding answers 20 November 2002]*: Since April 2002, the Government has been holding discussions with livestock and disposal industry stakeholders with the aim of developing a national fallen stock disposal scheme. At a stakeholder meeting on the 18 September the collection and disposal industries submitted a joint proposal for a National Fallen Stock collection and disposal scheme. I intend to meet the

industries to discuss their proposal. However, it is for the livestock industry, like other industries, to pay for the disposal of its waste.

No specific assessment has been made of the collection of fallen stock and its relationship with existing livestock movement regulations. However, there was agreement at the stakeholder meeting that additional guidance on detailed bio- security would need to be produced if plans for the scheme were to be taken forward.

Information regarding the number of fallen stock for each of the last 10 years is not available. However, it is estimated that something in the order of, at least, 200,000 tonnes of fallen stock will need to be collected annually. In arriving at this figure, assumptions have been made about mortality rates for adult and immature animals and their average weight.

Hunts and incinerators are permitted disposal routes for fallen stock, and are used by many farmers. We estimate there to be around 2500 on-farm incinerators, mostly on pig and poultry farms.

Flood Plains

Andrew Bennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what consideration has been given by the Environment Agency to identifying and preparing suitable areas of flood plains, adjacent to non-tidal reaches of rivers, for use as emergency wash-lands to minimise peak heights of floods occasioned by increases in the proportion of direct run-off as a result of changes in the amount and nature of precipitation. [80517]

Mr. Morley: Following the autumn 2000 floods the agency has been investigating solutions for the 700 affected locations. We consider whether it will be more appropriate to provide additional discharge capacity or to temporarily store excess water.

The agency carries out the option with the best return, taking into account the technical, environmental and economic aspects. In some cases the preferred option will involve the creation of flood storage areas which are purpose built reservoirs.

The agency ensures that the natural floodplain is utilised as much as possible during times of floods and seeks to prevent the location of inappropriate development in the floodplain.

The agency is planning to complete catchment flood management plans for the whole of England and Wales over the next five to six years. These will consider the impact of future development, land use changes and climate change and will explore the use of wetlands, washlands and flood storage areas in reducing flood risk to local communities.

Functional Foods

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what regulations are in place to ensure that new functional foods claiming to improve mental and physical well-being are covered by a legal framework. [81059]

Ms Blears: There are no specific regulations in place to control the use of claims for improving mental and physical well-being made on 'functional' foods. Claims on foods are controlled by provisions of the Food Safety Act 1990 and the Trade Descriptions Act 1968, which prohibit false and misleading claims. In addition, the Food Labelling Regulations 1996 (as amended) lay down general labelling requirements for foods and prohibit medical claims i.e. claims that a food will prevent, treat or cure a disease.

Mr. Wray: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what has been done in the past two years to promote scientific research into *(a)* the claims of functional foods and *(b)* their safety. [81060]

Ms Blears: I have been asked to reply.

The Government has not taken any specific steps to promote scientific research into the claims made for "functional foods" or their safety. "Functional foods", like other foods, must comply with the provisions of the Food Safety Act 1990, the Food Labelling Regulations (1969) as amended and the Trade Descriptions Act 1968.

The Food Standards Agency (FSA) supports the activities of the self-regulatory joint health claims initiative that has established a voluntary system for the scientific substantiation of health claims. The FSA also commissions a broad spectrum of research and surveys on nutrition and food safety, details of which are available through the agency's website.

GM Technology

Mr. Burstow: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, how she plans to assess public opinion regarding GM technology and commercialisation, [81226]

Mr. Meacher: The Government is sponsoring a public dialogue on GM technology and this will focus on issues and concerns raised by the public. The outcome of the debate could be invaluable in informing the Government's approach to decision making, and our view of the overall framework in which decisions are taken. We will listen, and learn, from the views emerging from the debate.

Imported Offal

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many tonnes of *(a)* sheep, *(b)* cattle, *(c)* pig and *(d)* poultry offal have entered the UK from *(i)* Latin America, (ii) Africa, (iii) South Asia, (iv) East Asia, *(v)* North America, (vi) the EU, (vii) non-EU Europe and (viii) Australasia in each of the last 10 years. [81571]

Mr. Morley: The table shows the UK imports of sheep, bovine, pig and poultry offal from *(i)* Latin America *(ii)* Africa *(iii)* South Asia *(iv)* East Asia *(v)* North America *(vi)*. The EU *(vii)* non-EU Europe and *(viii)* Australasia between 1992–2001, as recorded in the Official Overseas Trade Statistics.

Type of offal	*1992*	*1993*	*1994*	*1995*	*1996*	*1997*	*1998*	*1999*	*2000*	*2001*
Africa										
Bovine	0	0	0	0	18	0	0	0	0	0
Pig	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Poultry	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sheep	0	16	0	0	0	0	0	17	0	0
Total	0	16	0	0	18	0	0	17	0	0
Australasia										
Bovine	6,350	6,782	5,357	4,969	2,919	1,305	2,337	1,458	775	225
Pig	0	71	0	19	18	2	1	1	4	0
Poultry	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sheep	12,685	11,789	10,591	13,343	12,585	9,819	9,863	10,998	11,609	12,561
Total	19,035	18,641	15,948	18,331	15,552	11,126	12,201	12,457	12,388	12,786
East Asia										
Bovine	0	0	0	0	128	0	0	0	0	0
Pig	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Poultry	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sheep	0	0	0	0	0	18	207	0	0	0
Total	1	3	0	0	128	18	207	0	0	0
EU										
Bovine	21,139	20,027	16,411	13,868	9,021	13,360	9,457	11,243	12,731	11,418
Pig	25,066	18,935	20,932	21,348	16,465	16,569	18,187	18,609	28,028	22,939
Poultry	1,122	2,167	3,900	5,195	5,671	11,359	5,115	5,935	4,926	9,147
Sheep	978	717	503	453	650	358	315	372	249	375
Total	48,305	41,864	41,746	40,863	31,806	41,646	33,074	36,158	45,934	43,879
Latin America										
Bovine	372	402	768	1,477	888	485	311	570	827	546
Pig	0	0	0	14	0	0	0	0	0	0
Poultry	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	22	0	42
Sheep	203	141	184	60	96	33	61	79	139	47
Total	575	542	952	1,550	983	518	372	672	967	635
Non-EU Europe										
Bovine	36	33	87	19	0	0	0	0	14	41
Pig	0	1	3	0	0	0	7	0	0	0
Poultry	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	20
Sheep	0	0	0	0	0	0	18	0	0	28
Total	36	34	90	19	0	0	25	0	14	89
North America										
Bovine	1,446	1,850	1,804	1,610	752	75	16	0	0	0
Pig	4,748	3,091	3,313	2,872	1,914	479	596	227	176	133
Poultry	0	15	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sheep	35	0	36	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	6,228	4,956	5,153	4,482	2,666	554	612	227	176	133
South Asia										
Bovine	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Pig	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Poultry	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sheep	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Total	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Grand Total	74,180	66,039	63,889	65,246	51,123	53,861	46,491	49,531	59,479	57,523

Source:

HM Customs and Excise

Data prepared by Statistics (Commodities and Food) Accounts and Trade, ESD, DEFRA

Mobile Slaughtermen

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the Government's policy is towards the practice of home kills by mobile licensed slaughtermen. [80460]

Ms Blears: I have been asked to reply.

The Fresh Meat (Hygiene and Inspection) Regulations 1995 (as amended) require that no person shall carry on the business of a slaughterhouse unless the premises are licensed under the Regulations. Furthermore the regulations also require that no person shall sell fresh meat for human consumption unless it has been slaughtered in a licensed slaughterhouse.

It is unlawful for a mobile licensed slaughterman to kill and dress an animal outside of licensed premises where it is intended that the meat be used for human consumption. In addition, the slaughterman would further contravene the Regulations as he would be supplying goods—the dressed carcase—and a sale would therefore have taken place.

Poultry Imports

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what action her Department has taken to ensure that poultry imports meet the same *(a)* animal welfare, *(b)* chemical contact and *(c)* hygiene standards expected of United Kingdom-produced poultry meat. [81040]

Mr. Morley: The Government has made it clear the importance it attaches to developing and maintaining high welfare standards for all animals both domestically and internationally. We have made clear that trade liberalisation must not compromise EU standards of animal welfare and hygiene. Our concerns are fully reflected on the negotiating proposals that the Commission has submitted in the Doha Development Agenda

All poultry in the European Union must be slaughtered or killed in accordance with the requirements laid down in Council Directive 93/119/EC on the protection of animals at the time of slaughter or killing. This Directive should have been implemented in all Member States by 1 January 1995, and has been implemented in this country by the Welfare of Animals (Slaughter or Killing) Regulations 1995 (as amended). The Directive contains a requirement that birds imported from third countries must be slaughtered under conditions which offer guarantees of humane treatment at least equivalent to those provided for in the Directive.

In respect of chemical contact where illegal veterinary medicine residues, for example nitrofurans and chloramphenicol, have been detected in imports of poultry meat from third countries there is a requirement under community law to test all consignments at border inspection posts. Consignments are not allowed entry if they are found to contain these chemicals. Nitrofurans and chloramphenicol are not permitted for use in food producing animals in the EU due to public health concerns. Therefore their residues should not be present in food.

Imports into the United Kingdom of animal products are governed by European community legislation, which contains provisions to protect both animal and public health. Under these rules only third countries approved by the Commission on the advice of the Standing Committee on Food Chain and Animal Health may export into the community, and only from establishments which meet community hygiene standards. The lists of countries and establishments allowed to export particular products into the community, are available on the Commission's website at the following address:

http://forum.europa.eu.int/irc/sanco/vets/info/data/listes/tableO.html

Imports of poultry meat from third countries must have been produced to the standards at least equivalent to those laid down in Council Directive 71/118/EEC. In addition, all consignments of fresh poultry meat imported from third countries are subject to veterinary inspection on entering the EU to ensure that conditions of import have been complied with and to ensure that they have remained in a satisfactory condition during transport.

Responsibility for ensuring that third countries meet these requirements lies with the Food and Veterinary Office (FVO) of the European Commission . FVO reports are published on their website at: http://euroDa.eu.int/comm/food/fs/insDections/vi/reports/index en.html.

Rural Payments Agency

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what funding has been allocated to the Rural Payments Agency in each of the last five years. [82203]

Alun Michael: The Rural Payments Agency (RPA) was established on 16 October 2001 as a single EU paying agency, combining the functions previously undertaken by the Intervention Board and the Defra paying agencies. RPA's published accounts for 2001–02 (HC 1197) give details of the funding allocated to the Agency in that financial year and for 2000–01 on a comparative basis. Combined figures for prior years covering the activities now administered by RPA have not been produced. RPA's budget for 2002–03 is shown in the table below.

RPA is partway through a £130 million restructuring programme that will deliver a step change in customer service when completed in 2005. These funds are ring fenced and are allocated separately, over and above the amounts quoted.

£000

	2002–03
DEL administration	111,140
DEL programme	257,314
AME	1,933,988
Local authorities	6,495
Payments to DGD's	695,440
EU receipts	−2,396,824
Net total	607,553

TB Reactor Cattle

Mr. Roger Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the estimated cost is of maintenance of TB reactor cattle per day while awaiting slaughter; and if that cost is met by her Department. [81569]

Mr. Morley: Information on the cost of maintaining TB reactor cattle awaiting slaughter is not held by Defra.

Government pays compensation for cattle compulsorily slaughtered under TB control measures but does not pay for the maintenance of animals awaiting removal from farm.

Veterinary Practices

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many veterinary practices and surgeries are *(a)* registered and *(b)* not registered with the RCVS in the UK. [81155]

Mr. Morley: *(a)* There are 3,539 veterinary practices and practice branches listed in the Royal College of Veterinary Surgeons "Directory of Practices". In addition, the College holds details of 74 charity veterinary clinics/hospitals who are not listed in their directory, giving a total of 3,613.

(b) No figures available.

INDEX TO THE

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES

OFFICIAL REPORT

SIXTH SERIES **VOLUME 394**

SESSION 2002–2003

13th November—21st November 2002

Printed indexes to Hansard

The volume index is one of three printed indexes to Commons Hansard produced from the House of Commons Library's Parliamentary On-Line Indexing Service (POLIS). It contains references to material in the bound volumes of Hansard. The other indexes produced are:

- The fortnightly index to Hansard. This covers the same date range as the volume index but references are to the column numbering in the daily parts and weekly edition of Hansard.
- The sessional index to Hansard. This contains references to material in the bound volumes for a whole session.

Indexes on the Parliamentary website

Fortnightly, volume and sessional indexes covering material from the beginning of the 1999/2000 session will also appear on the Parliamentary website at http://www.parliament.uk with links to the full text of Hansard.

SCOPE

The indexes include entries covering:

- The content of all material recorded in Hansard, including debates, procedural motions and questions.
- The names of all Members contributing to the Parliamentary business recorded in Hansard.
- The names of some types of Parliamentary business whenever they occur in Hansard. These are 'Ministerial statements', 'Business statements', 'Opposition days' and 'Estimates days'.

ARRANGEMENT

- All headings are in one word-by-word alphabetical sequence, with Members' contribution entries distinguished from other entries by italics.
- Where a Member contributes to Parliamentary business and is the subject of Parliamentary business there are separate contribution and subject entries, the subject entry coming first.
- Entries beginning 'Mac' and 'Mc' are sorted in one sequence as 'Mac'.
- 'St', when abbreviated for Saint, is filed as 'Saint'.
- Numbers are filed as if spelt out, e.g. '10 Downing Street' as if 'Ten Downing Street'.

HEADINGS

Choice of headings

- *Specificity*—Entries summarise the overall content of a debate or question as specifically as the various POLIS thesauruses allow. For example, Education, Higher education, Universities or the name of a particular university is used depending on the breadth of the item.
- *Name headings*—Specific entries are included for the names of people, places, institutions, organisations, committees, programmes, initiatives, publications and legislation when these constitute the overall subject of an item.
- *Organisations and subjects*—Organisation entries are preferred for material about the general performance, administration and staffing of an organisation (for example, United Kingdom Passports Agency, Standards). Subject entries are preferred for what organisations do as part of their duties (for example, Passports, Fees and charges).

Geographical coverage

- *Subject headings*—Subject headings are assumed to refer to the whole of England, Great Britain or the United Kingdom unless otherwise stated.
- *Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales*—Material relating to the whole of Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales is indexed under these headings.
- *Places within the UK*—Material about specific towns, areas and institutions is entered under the name of the specific town, area or institution.
- *Foreign countries*—Most material relating to foreign countries is collected under the name of that country. Some additional material may be found under the names of—groups of countries, areas within countries, geographical features, place names associated with particular issues, politicians and heads of state, international bodies, and institutions and companies operating in those countries.
- *EC/EU material*—General material about the European Communities and European institutions as bodies is entered under 'European Communities' and 'EC institutions'. Organisational material about specific communities and institutions is entered under the name of the body, for example 'European Coal and Steel Community' or 'European Parliament'. Material about what the Communities and institutions are doing or propose to do is entered under various subject headings beginning 'EC' such as 'EC environmental policy'.

Parliamentary material and business

- *Material about Parliament*—This is indexed under 'Parliament', the names of the two Houses, the 'Palace of Westminster' and parts of the Parliamentary estate (such as 'Portcullis House').
- *Committees*—Material about committees is indexed under 'Committees', types of committee (such as 'Select committees') and the names of individual committees (such as 'Home Affairs Select Committee').
- *Parliamentary proceedings/procedures*—Material discussing these is indexed under the specific type of proceeding (such as 'Parliamentary questions' or 'Oral questions'), procedure (such as 'Calling of Members') or issue (such as 'Unparliamentary expressions').
- *Legislation*—Entries for Parliamentary proceedings on bills and statutory instruments are entered under their titles. Where the lead word of the bill or statutory instrument does not provide a full or clear indication of the subject there are additional subject entries when the bill or instrument is debated. For example, debates on the 'Child Support Pensions and Social Security Bill' have entries under 'Pensions' and 'Social security benefits' as well as under the title of the Bill.
- *Members' names*—These are given in the form by which the Member prefers to be known.
- *Speaker and Chair*—Contributions by the Speaker and deputies are brought together under the heading 'Speaker and deputies'. Contributions from the chair during Committees of the Whole House are brought together under 'Chairman of Committee of the Whole House'. Significant rulings and statements (as opposed to routine comments) are indicated by the sub-heading 'Rulings and statements' in both cases.

Guidance on headings

- *Cross references*—'See' references indicate all the material has been entered under another heading. 'See also' references indicate that additional information may be found under another heading.
- *Concept thesaurus*—A copy of the subject thesaurus to POLIS, listing the concept entries used in the index, is available on the Parliamentary website. A hard copy is available from the Head of the POLIS Unit, House of Commons Library, 1 Derby Gate, London, SW1A 2DG (020 7219 6456).

REFERENCES

- References in the indexes are to columns rather than pages.
- References to debates, but not questions, are accompanied by the date of the item.
- There are separate sequences in Hansard for the material taken on the floor of the House, Westminster Hall sittings and written questions:
  - References consisting of a number by itself indicate material taken on the floor of the House.
  - References ending in 'wh' indicate Westminster Hall sittings.
  - References ending in 'ws' indicate written statements.
  - References ending in 'w' indicate written questions.
- References under all headings except the names of Members contributing to Parliamentary business and the titles of legislation are listed in one numerical sequence irrespective of whether the material is taken on the floor of the House, is discussed at a Westminster Hall sitting, is a written statement or is a written question.
- References under the names of Members contributing to Parliamentary business and the titles of legislation are listed in numerical sequence under the following headings:
  - *Debates etc.* (which includes interventions and points of order as well as significant contributions to debates);
  - *Sittings in Westminster Hall* (covering all debates held as part of the Westminster Hall sittings); and
  - *Written Statements* (consisting of ministerial statements issued in writing); and
  - *Questions* (which includes all written, oral and private notice questions).

ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviations are used in connection with the progress of bills:

- 1R=First reading
- 2R=Second reading
- Com=Committee stage
- Rep=Report stage
- 3R=Third reading
- res=resolution
- amendt(s)=amendment(s)
- *=matter taken formally without debate or division
- (HL)=Bill starting in House of Lords
- (SP)=Bill in Scottish Parliament.

Parliamentary background

- The Parliamentary website at http://www.parliament.uk contains a range of information about Parliament and the full text of some Parliamentary papers and proceedings including Hansard.
- Information on current Parliamentary business is provided in the House of Commons Information Office *Weekly Information Bulletin*, available on the website and from The Stationery Office (020 7873 8499).
- Further information on Parliamentary proceedings and procedures is available from the House of Commons Information Office (020 7219 4272).

A6
Bypasses 75w

A34
Repairs and maintenance 75–6w

A249
259w

Abandoned vehicles
288w

Abortion
96–7w

Absent voting
33–4w

Accidents
Air displays 79w
Cycling 21w, 179w
Railways 22w, 173–4w, (15.11.02) 338–44, 485–7
Roads 173–4w

Accountancy
Government departments 187w
Intelligence services 19w

Adam Smith Institute
Dept for International Development 2–4w

Addresses to the Crown
Queen's speech (13.11.02) 6–13

Adoption
Homosexuality 97–8w

Adoption and Children Act 2002
Questions
235w

"Adult Skills in the 21st Century - Part 2"
2–3ws

Advertising
Business links 256w
Treasury 67–8w

Advisory services
Children in care 235w

Advocacy
Children in care 235w

Aerials
633–4

Aeroplane Noise Regulations 1999
Questions
177w

Afghanistan
44w
Detainees 127w
International assistance 249w
Overseas aid 16–7w
Peace keeping operations 209w

Africa
Food supply 1–2w
Health 194w

Age
Discrimination 104–5w, 632–3
Farmers 157w

"Agenda to Deliver a Modern Fire Service"
(14.11.02) 140–63

Agriculture
see also Farmers and Farms
Pollution 167w

***Ainsworth, Bob**, Parliamentary Secretary, Home Office*
Written Statements
"Animal Procedures Committee Annual Report, 2001" 2ws
Questions
Airguns 246w

***Ainsworth, Bob**—continued*
Animal experiments 134–6w
Assets Recovery Agency, Northern Ireland 4w
Cycling, Road traffic offences 246–8w
Deer, Animal welfare 247w
Heroin 247–8w
Human trafficking 130w

Ainsworth, Mr Peter
Questions
"Road Traffic Penalties Consultation Paper" 248w

Air conditioning
10 Downing Street 254w
Treasury 73–4w

Air displays
Accidents 79w

Air Navigation (Environmental Standards) Order 2002
Questions
177w

Air pollution
5–6w, 39w
Aviation 178w
Central heating 41–2w
Urban areas 284w

Air routes
USA 181w

Air traffic
180–1w
Research 174–5w, 179w

Aircraft
Noise 175–7w

Airguns
246w

Airports
185w, 260w
Fees and charges 178w
Kent 638
Landing rights 180w
Rugby Warwickshire 76w
Security 259w
South East region 78w

***Alexander, Mr Douglas**, Minister of State, Cabinet Office*
Written Statements
"In Demand" 2–3ws
Public sector, Risk assessment 37ws
Regulatory impact assessments 37ws
Questions
Business, Regulation 43w
Civil defence, Wales 202w
Civil servants, Ethnic groups 502–4
Civil servants, Pensions 23–4w
Electronic government 43w, 501–2
Government Car and Despatch Agency 202w
Government departments, Security 43w
Government departments, Standards 43w
Hacking, Cabinet Office 209w
Ministerial policy advisors, EC law 202–3w
Ministers, Codes of practice 504
Ministers, Official cars 202w
Public appointments, Females 43–4w
Tolls, Cabinet Office 93w

Allen, Mr Graham
Questions
Children, Departmental responsibilities 137–8w
Children in care, Advocacy 235w
Children in care, Education 58w
Correspondence, Prime Minister 17w

***Allen, Mr Graham**—continued*
Government departments, Disclosure of information 18w
Government departments, Legal opinion 18w
Intelligence services, Accountancy 19w
Parliamentary scrutiny, Legislative drafting 44w
Rain forests, Debts 257w
Royal prerogative 19w
Written questions, Prime Minister 18–9w

Amess, Mr David
Debates etc.
Queen's speech (13.11.02) 111–4
Questions
"Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority Annual Report and Accounts, 2002" 238w
In vitro fertilisation 238w

Amey Vectra
London Underground 274w

Ancram, Rt Hon Michael
Questions
Entry clearances 47–8w

Anderson, Rt Hon Donald
Debates etc.
Fire services (21.11.02) 893–4

Angina
Driving 79w

Angola
194–5w
Exservicemen 194w

Animal By-Products Order 1999
Questions
40w, 155w

Animal experiments
134–6w

"Animal Procedures Committee Annual Report, 2001"
2ws

Animal products
Waste disposal 39w

Animal welfare
Deer 247w

Anniversaries
D-Day landings 35w
Queen Elizabeth II 37w

Annuities
22–3w, 279w

Armed conflict
Iraq 274w, 638–9, 644

Armed forces
211–3w
Death 113–5w, 118w
Deployment 14w
Disciplinary proceedings 115w
Fire services 113w, 211w, 217–8w, 221w
Health 219w
Intimidation 14w
Manpower 222–4w
Perjury 35w
Protective clothing 115w
Recruitment 38w
Retirement 117w
Training 115–6w

Arms trade
BAE Systems 149w
Israel 233w
Zimbabwe 9w

Army
British citizenship 209–10w

Arrest warrants
EC action 128w

Arson
Buckinghamshire 80w

Arthritis
235w

Arts
Young people 13–4w

Assets Recovery Agency
Northern Ireland 4w

Asthma
Compensation 109w

ASW Sheerness
106w

ASW Steel Mill
Standing order no 24 applications (18.11.02) 381–2

Asylum
Children 129w
Finance 2ws
Housing 133–4w
Liverpool 54w

Atherton, Ms Candy
Questions
Taxation, Company cars 273w

Australia
Climate Change Convention 139w

Aviation
20w, 487–92
Air pollution 178w
Emissions trading scheme 175w
Excise duties 68w, 187–8w
Midlands 488–9
Scotland 488–9
Security 177–8w

Avient Air
44–5w

Bacon, Mr Richard
Debates etc.
Oral question time intervention (20.11.02) 644
Questions
Pigs, Subsidies 281w

Badgers
see Bovine tuberculosis

BAE Systems
Arms trade 149w

Bailey, Mr Adrian
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Crime (20.11.02) 714–6
Questions
Metals, Pollution control 777–8

Baird, Vera
Debates etc.
Fisheries (21.11.02) 838
Queen's speech, Crime (20.11.02) 675, 687, 699–701
Sexual offences (19.11.02) 513–4
Questions
Sentencing, Rape 252w

Baker, Norman
Questions
Airports 185w
Animal experiments 134–6w
Aviation, Air pollution 178w
Climate change 158–9w
Climate Change Convention, USA 139w
Climate change levy, Nuclear power 186w
Connex Rail, Franchises 184w
Consultants, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 155w

Baker, Norman—continued
Electricity generation 152w
Environment protection 138–9w
Environment protection, Departmental coordination 156–7w
Environmental Protection Act 1990 772
Excise duties, Aviation 187–8w
Exhaust emissions 178–9w
Government Car and Despatch Agency 202w
Government departments, Accountancy 187w
Health hazards 206w
Mass media, Ownership 170–1w
Maundy money, Costs 189w
Members, Cycling 173w
Ministers, Codes of practice 504
Ministers, Official cars 202w
Official residences, Repairs and maintenance 138w
Private finance initiative 191w
Railway stations 183w
Railways, Electrification 183w
Railways, Fares 184w
Railways, Lewes 75w
Renewable energy 153w
Road traffic 183–4w
Roads, Accidents 173–4w
Roads, Construction 181w
Security, Expenditure 140w
Sewage, Recycling 166–7w
Taxation, Official cars 189w
Transport, Costs 184–5w
Transport, Infrastructure 266–7w
Transport, Radioactive materials 181–2w, 255–6w
Transsexualism 208w
12 Downing Street, Repairs and maintenance 140w
Water supply 167–8w

Baldry, Tony
Debates etc.
Queen's speech (13.11.02) 78–84
Sexual offences (19.11.02) 518
Questions
Africa, Food supply 1–2w
Council housing 627
Cricket 353

Bank for Reconstruction and Development of Europe
see European Bank for Reconstruction and Development

Banks
Licensing 272w
Switzerland 186w

Banks, Mr Tony
Questions
Electoral register, Northern Ireland 253w

Barker, Gregory
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Health services (14.11.02) 167
Questions
Rural areas, Regeneration 166w
Soil 167w

Barnes, Mr Harry
Debates etc.
Fire services (14.11.02) 159, (21.11.02) 896–7
Local government finance, Derbyshire (14.11.02) 255, 259–60
Queen's speech (13.11.02) 100–3
Questions
Stagecoach Holdings 78w

Baron, Mr John
Debates etc.
Fire services (14.11.02) 160–1
Questions
EC aid 3w

Barrett, John
Questions
Developing countries, Coffee 193–4w
Developing countries, Education 15–6w
Developing countries, Sub-Saharan Africa 193w
Development aid 250w
Sudan, Overseas aid 201–2w
World Bank 192–3w
World Bank, Public appointments 191–2w
Zimbabwe, HIV infection 198w

Barron, Rt Hon Kevin
Debates etc.
Fire services (14.11.02) 157–8
Queen's speech (13.11.02) 38–42

Bassenthwaite Lake
Pollution 287w

Baton rounds
210–1w

Batteries
Recycling 106–7w

Battle, Rt Hon John
Questions
Business questions 135–6
Employment, Leeds 185–6w

Bayley, Hugh
Questions
Crime prevention 642–3
Fire stations, York 124–5w
Housing, Northern region 118–9w
Magistrates' courts, York 208w
UK Sport, Finance 171w

BBC
169w
Commercial activities 229–30w
Finance 229w
Scotland 10w

BBC News 24 Review
169w

BBC Worldwide
Digital broadcasting 228–31w

Beard, Mr Nigel
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Economic policy (18.11.02) 440–3

Beckett, Rt Hon Margaret, *Secretary of State for Environment Food and the Regions*
Questions
Common agricultural policy, Reform 773–5
Meat, Smuggling 767–70

Bed and breakfast accommodation
Expenditure 80w

Beef
France 139w

Begg, Miss Anne
Debates etc.
Fisheries (21.11.02) 805
Questions
Arts, Young people 13–4w

Beggs, Mr Roy
Debates etc.
Committee of Selection (21.11.02) 877
Fisheries (21.11.02) 852
Queen's speech (13.11.02) 47

Beggs, Mr Roy*—*continued
Queen's speech, Education (15.11.02) 270
Questions
Bovine tuberculosis 783–4
Business questions 793–4
Dyslexia 56w
Hydroelectric power, Scotland 109w
Illegal immigrants, Northern Ireland 128–9w
Petrol, Northern Ireland 253–4w
Secondary education, Northern Ireland 203w

Beith, Rt Hon A J
Debates etc.
Fisheries (21.11.02) 805
Questions
Absent voting 33–4w
Electoral systems, Public participation 359–61
Electronic government 502
Local government, Elections 33w

***Bell, Mr Stuart**, Second Church Estates Commissioner*
Questions
Cathedrals, Repairs and maintenance 364
Church Commissioners, Assets 362–4
Churches, VAT 25w, 358–9
House of Lords, Bishops 24w
Ministers of religion, Conditions of employment 361–2
Ministers of religion, Pay 24w
Ministers of religion, Pensions 24w

Bellingham, Mr Henry
Debates etc.
Fire services (14.11.02) 149–50
Queen's speech, Economic policy (18.11.02) 448
Questions
Air displays, Accidents 79w
Batteries, Recycling 106–7w
Common agricultural policy, Reform 774
Ministerial policy advisors, EC law 202–3w
Planning, Reform 631
Railways, Accidents 485–6
Small businesses, Equal opportunities 151–2w

Bennett, Andrew
Debates etc.
Committee of Selection (21.11.02) 879, 883
Questions
Flood control 291w
Local government finance 122w
Tipping of waste 286w

Bercow, Mr John
Debates etc.
Effala, Madeline (19.11.02) 624
Oral question time intervention (18.11.02) 357
Queen's speech (13.11.02) 36, 49, 51–2, 59, 62
Queen's speech, Crime (20.11.02) 653, 662
Queen's speech, Economic policy (18.11.02) 406, 418, 430–3, 435
Queen's speech, Health services (14.11.02) 169
Queen's speech, Regional government (19.11.02) 534–6, 542
Sexual offences (19.11.02) 516
Social security benefits (18.11.02) 379
Questions
Aerials 634
Business questions 136–7
Civil servants, Ethnic groups 503
Bercow, Mr John*—*continued
Ministers of religion, Conditions of employment 361–2
Pay, Dept for International Development 250w
Public expenditure, Dept for International Development 251w
Sports competitors, Finance 351–2

Beresford, Sir Paul
Debates etc.
Sexual offences (19.11.02) 514

"Better Deal for Victims and Witnesses" 47–8ws

Betts, Mr Clive
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Regional government (19.11.02) 525, 568–71
Questions
Council housing 625–6
Football Association 12–3w

Bicycles 262w

Birmingham
European City of Culture 346–7

Birmingham Airport 20w

Birmingham Relief Road 499–500

Bisham
Public footpaths 157–8w

Bishops 136–7w
House of Lords 24w

***Blair, Rt Hon Tony**, Prime Minister, First Lord of the Treasury and Minister for the Civil Service*
Debates etc.
Queen's speech (13.11.02) 20–30
Written Statements
"Standards of Conduct in the House of Commons" 43ws
Questions
Airports, Kent 638
Beef, France 139w
Bishops 136–7w
Children, Departmental responsibilities 137–8w
Climate Change Convention, USA 139w
Correspondence, Prime Minister 17w
Crime, Victims 641–2
Crime prevention 642–3
Departmental responsibilities 140w
Environment protection 138–9w
Fire services, Industrial disputes 639–40
Floods, Moray 641
Gibraltar, Sovereignty 17w
Government departments, Disclosure of information 18w
Government departments, Legal opinion 18w
Health services, NHS 635–6
Higher education 643–4
Hospital beds, Norfolk 644
Intelligence services, Accountancy 19w
Iraq 635
Iraq, Armed conflict 638–9, 644
Lancashire, Prime Minister 140w
Mental Health Bill (Draft) 642
Ministerial statements 18w
Ministers, Charter flights 18w
Ministers, Official gifts 17w
Northern Ireland government 640–1
Official engagements, Prime Minister 138w
Official gifts, Royal family 254w
Blair, Rt Hon Tony*—*continued
Official residences, Repairs and maintenance 138w
Peers 17w
Pensions, Lord Chancellor's Dept 93w
Police, Northern Ireland 640
Police stations, Northern Ireland 136w
Public appointments, Prime Minister 644
Queen's speech, Press releases 19w
Royal prerogative 19w
Rural areas 94w
Security, Expenditure 140w
Swaminarayan Hindu Mission, Petitions 140w
10 Downing Street, Air conditioning 254w
Terrorism, Fire services 637–8
Terrorism, Health services 636
12 Downing Street, Repairs and maintenance 140w
White fish, Quotas 643
Written questions, Prime Minister 18–9w

***Blears, Ms Hazel**, Parliamentary Secretary, Dept of Health*
Questions
Abortion 96–7w
Dental services, Gosport 236–7w
European Food Safety Authority 101w
Fertility, Males 238w
Food, Labelling 291–2w
Gender selection 245w
Health hazards 206w
Health services, Buckinghamshire 239–40w
Heart diseases 236w
Hepatitis 101–2w
Hospital beds, Buckinghamshire 235–6w
"Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority Annual Report and Accounts, 2002" 238w
In vitro fertilisation 238w
MMR vaccine 102w
Patients, Foreigners 241w
Poultry meat, Food composition 242–3w
Prescriptions 243w
Rendering industry 295w
Royal Naval Hospital Haslar 244–5w
Royal United Hospital Bath 102–3w

Bletchley Park
Museums and galleries 230w

Blizzard, Mr Bob
Debates etc.
Fisheries (21.11.02) 809, 815–6, 855–7
Queen's speech, Health services (14.11.02) 177
Questions
Lead, Pollution control 766
Licensing laws, Young people 12w

Blue badge scheme 21w

***Blunkett, Rt Hon David**, Secretary of State for the Home Dept*
Debates etc.
Criminal Justice Bill, 1R (21.11.02) 800
Extradition Bill, 1R (14.11.02) 164
Queen's speech, Crime (20.11.02) 649–50, 653, 655–66
Sexual offences, Ministerial statements (19.11.02) 505–20
Written Statements
"Better Deal for Victims and Witnesses" 47–8ws
Frontiers, France 5ws

Blunt, Mr Crispin
Debates etc.
Fire services (14.11.02) 151
Queen's speech, Crime (20.11.02) 686–8, 698–9, 736

***Blunt, Mr Crispin**—continued*
Queen's speech, Economic policy (18.11.02) 423

***Boateng, Rt Hon Paul**, Chief Secretary to the Treasury*
Questions
Future Builders' Fund 69–70w
Government departments, Accountancy 187w
Local government finance, Eddisbury 71w
National Audit Office 72w
Public expenditure 72–3w
Public finance 72w

Bookmakers
Finance 168w

Bosnia
Police 38–9ws

Boswell, Mr Tim
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Further education (21.11.02) 7wh, 10–7wh, 22wh

Bottomley, Peter
Debates etc.
Queen's speech (13.11.02) 70–4
Questions
Equality 632
Tourism, Coastal areas 348

Bottomley, Rt Hon Virginia
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Health services (14.11.02) 203–7

Bovine tuberculosis
297w, 782–4
Disease control 154w, 282–3w

Bradley, Peter
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Crime (20.11.02) 710–2

***Bradshaw, Mr Ben**, Parliamentary Secretary to President of the Council and Leader of the House*
Debates etc.
Committee of Selection (21.11.02) 879–84

Brady, Mr Graham
Debates etc.
Fire services (21.11.02) 898
Questions
Learning and Skills Council for England, Resignations 142–4w
Learning and skills councils 145–6w
Schools, Finance 31w
Taxpayers 188w

Brake, Tom
Questions
Air routes, USA 181w
Air traffic 180–1w
Air traffic, Research 174–5w, 179w
Aircraft, Noise 175–7w
Airports 260w
Airports, Fees and charges 178w
Airports, Landing rights 180w
Aviation, Emissions trading scheme 175w
Heathrow Airport 264w
Transport 260–1w

Brazier, Mr Julian
Debates etc.
Ministerial statement intervention (18.11.02) 368, 370
Sexual offences (19.11.02) 517

Bredenkamp, John
9–10w

Breed, Mr Colin
Questions
HMS Trafalgar 116w

Brennan, Kevin
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Health services (14.11.02) 212, 217–9, 246
Questions
Absent voting 33–4w
British Irish Council 121w

Bridges
Chelmsford 498–9

British citizenship
Army 209–10w

British Irish Council
121w

British Irish Intergovernmental Secretariat
252–3w

Broadband
149–50w

Broadcasting Act 1990
Questions
233w

Broadcasting programmes
Computers 233w
Independent producers 231w

Brooke, Mrs Annette L
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Economic policy (18.11.02) 464–5
Questions
Abandoned vehicles 288w

***Brown, Rt Hon Gordon**, Chancellor of the Exchequer*
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Economic policy (18.11.02) 385–99
Questions
Pre-Budget report 2002 1w

Brown, Mr Russell
Debates etc.
Fisheries (21.11.02) 858–9
Questions
Meat, Smuggling 768–9

***Browne, Mr Desmond**, Parliamentary Secretary, Northern Ireland Office*
Questions
British Irish Intergovernmental Secretariat 252–3w
Electoral register, Northern Ireland 253w

Browning, Mrs Angela
Debates etc.
Fire services (14.11.02) 162
Queen's speech, Economic policy (18.11.02) 403, 419, 454–6, 471–2
Social security benefits (18.11.02) 375
Questions
Business questions 136

Bruce, Malcolm
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Economic policy (18.11.02) 431, 449–52
Questions
Aviation 487–8
Combined heat and power 281w

Bryant, Mr Chris
Debates etc.
Sexual offences (19.11.02) 517
Questions
Business questions 796

***Bryant, Mr Chris**—continued*
Electoral systems, Public participation 360–1
Electronic government 43w
House of Lords, Bishops 24w

BSE
Disease control 155w, 290w

Buckinghamshire
Arson 80w
Education 56–7w
Fire services 85w
Health services 239–40w
Hospital beds 235–6w
Local government finance 87–8w, 126w
Non-teaching staff 61w
Schools 59–60w
Secondary education 60w
Teachers 60w, 67w

Buckinghamshire County Council
Standards 91–2w

Budget April 2002
Leaflets 71w

Burden, Richard
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Economic policy (18.11.02) 456–8
Questions
Aviation, Midlands 488–9

Burma
International assistance 248–9w

Burnett, Mr John
Debates etc.
Committee of Selection (21.11.02) 876
Queen's speech, Crime (20.11.02) 671
Questions
Devonport Dockyard, Security 215–6w

Burnham, Andy
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Crime (20.11.02) 727–30
Questions
Railways, North West region 77w

Burns, Mr Simon
Debates etc.
Fire services (14.11.02) 159
Questions
Bridges, Chelmsford 498–9
Mid Essex Hospital Services NHS Trust, Waiting lists 239w

Burnside, David
Debates etc.
Fisheries (21.11.02) 802, 808, 814
Queen's speech (13.11.02) 26
Queen's speech, Regional government (19.11.02) 555, 562–3, 581–3
Questions
Aviation 491–2
Horticulture, Northern Ireland 48w
Meat, Smuggling 769

Burstow, Mr Paul
Questions
Foster care 101w
Genetically modified organisms 292w
Hospital beds 100–1w
Housing, Construction 119w
Mental health services, Children 103–4w
Olympic Games, Greater London 14w

Burt, Alistair
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Economic policy (18.11.02) 436–40, 470
Questions
Non-food crops 784

Bus lanes
261w

Bus services
75w, 261w, 496–8, 500
Excise duties 2ws
Petitions (19.11.02) 617–8

Buses
20w

Business
Environment protection 282w
Regional planning and development 149w
Regulation 43w

Business interests
Civil servants 223w

Business links
Advertising 256w

Business motions
(18.11.02) 473–4

Business statements
127–39, 785–99

Butterfill, Mr John
Debates etc.
Queen's speech (13.11.02) 28
Queen's speech, Health services (14.11.02) 219–22, 250

Byers, Rt Hon Stephen
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Health services (14.11.02) 190–3

Bypasses
A6 75w

Cabinet Office
Hacking 209w
Tolls 93w

Cable, Mr Vincent
Questions
Employment agencies 257w
London Underground, Crime 496
Official cars, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 163w

Caborn, Rt Hon Richard, Minister of State for Sport, Dept for Culture Media and Sport
Questions
Bookmakers, Finance 168w
Chess 357–8
Cricket 352–4
Football Association 12–3w
Millennium Stadium 231w
Olympic Games, Greater London 14w
Physical education 11w
Playing fields, Planning permission 232w
Public libraries, Chartermark scheme 10w
Sports 13w
Sports, Finance 171–2w, 228w
Sports, Young people 11w
Sports competitors, Finance 230w, 350–2
Television, Licensing 171w
World class performance programme 12w

Cairns, David
Debates etc.
Queen's speech (13.11.02) 35
Social security benefits (18.11.02) 380
Questions
Tourism, Coastal areas 349

Calton, Mrs Patsy
Questions
Mental Health Bill (Draft) 642
Transport, Finance 493

Cameron, Mr David
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Crime (20.11.02) 657

Cameron, Mr David—continued
Queen's speech, Economic policy (18.11.02) 388
Questions
Fuels, Excise duties 780

Campbell, Mr Alan
Debates etc.
Fisheries (21.11.02) 851–3

Campbell, Mrs Anne
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Crime (20.11.02) 684–6
Questions
Railways, Accidents 487
Train operating companies, Standards 76w

Capital allowances
187w

Carbon dioxide
Pollution control 123w

Card games
357–8

Care homes
Assessments 99–100w
Fees and charges 241w

Carmichael, Mr Alistair
Debates etc.
Fisheries (21.11.02) 812, 818, 843, 853–5
North Sea oil (13.11.02) 118–21, 124
Questions
Fisheries 775–6
White fish, Quotas 643

Cathedrals
Repairs and maintenance 364

CDC Capital Partners
199w

Cellular phone masts
see Aerials

Central Africa
Overseas aid 16w
Politics and government 234w

Central heating
Air pollution 41–2w
Oil 41–2w

Chairman of Committee of the Whole House
Debates etc.
Amendments and new clauses (21.11.02) 868

Challen, Mr Colin
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Economic policy (18.11.02) 402, 427–30, 432
Questions
Post offices, Urban areas 126w

Chancellor of the Exchequer
see Treasury

Channel tunnel railway line
262w

Chapman, Mr Ben
Questions
Aerials 633–4
Bicycles 262w
Cycling 262–3w
Cycling, Accidents 21w, 179w
Cycling, Helmets 75w
Cycling, Road traffic offences 246–8w
Ministers of religion, Conditions of employment 361–2

Chapman, Sir Sydney
Questions
Church Commissioners, Assets 362–3
Fly tipping 283–4w

Chapman, Sir Sydney—continued
Roads, Tolls 493

Charter flights
Ministers 18w

Chartermark scheme
Public libraries 10w

Chaytor, Mr David
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Further education (21.11.02) 4–5wh, 30–6wh

Chelmsford
Bridges 498–9

Chemicals
Trade competitiveness 150–2w

Chesham
Housing 225w

Chess
357–8

Chief of Defence Logistics
see Defence Logistics Organisation

Chiefs of staff
212w

Child tax credit
Kettering 68–9w

Children
Asylum 129w
Departmental responsibilities 137–8w
Mental health services 103–4w
Overseas aid 198w
Theatre 98–100w

Children in care
Advisory services 235w
Advocacy 235w
Education 58w

Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000
Questions
235w

China
Guided weapons 47w

Chiropody
Registration 242w

Chope, Mr Christopher
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Education (15.11.02) 264, 313–6
Written questions, Points of order (20.11.02) 646
Questions
Blue badge scheme 21w
Council tax 123w
Driving, Angina 79w
Higher education, Finance 57w, 142w
London Underground, Crime 496
Regional assemblies 629–30
Tolls, Cabinet Office 93w
Tolls, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 169–70w
Tolls, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 40–1w
Tolls, Dept for International Development 49w
Tolls, Dept for Transport 79–80w
Tolls, Dept for Work and Pensions 104w
Tolls, Dept of Trade and Industry 256–7w
Tolls, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 45w
Tolls, House of Commons Commission 148w
Tolls, Lord Chancellor's Dept 94–5w
Tolls, Northern Ireland Office 253w
Tolls, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 81w, 169w

Chope, Mr Christopher*—*continued
Tolls, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 96w
Tolls, Scotland Office 94w
Tolls, Treasury 95w

Church Commissioners
Assets 362–4

Churches
VAT 25w, 358–9

Civil defence
Wales 202w

Civil servants
Business interests 223w
Ethnic groups 502–4
Pensions 23–4w

Clappison, Mr James
Debates etc.
Railways, Accidents (15.11.02) 338–40

***Clarke, Rt Hon Charles**, Secretary of State, for Education and Skills*
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Education (15.11.02) 261–74, 279, 281, 294, 299
Written Statements
Education, Finance 13–4ws

Clarke, Rt Hon Kenneth
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Economic policy (18.11.02) 389–90, 424–7, 472–3

Clarke, Rt Hon Tom
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Crime (20.11.02) 688–90

Clarke, Mr Tony
Questions
Housing, Private sector 119–20w

Class sizes
28–30w

Clelland, Mr David
Debates etc.
Queen's speech (13.11.02) 46–52, 57–8
Questions
Regional assemblies 628–9

Clifton-Brown, Mr Geoffrey
Debates etc.
Fisheries (21.11.02) 819
Queen's speech (13.11.02) 50
Queen's speech, Regional government (19.11.02) 596, 603
Questions
Bovine tuberculosis, Disease control 282–3w
Ministers of religion, Pensions 24w

Climate change
120w, 158–9w

Climate Change Convention
Australia 139w
USA 139w

Climate change levy
Nuclear power 186w

Clwyd, Ann
Questions
Operation Sandcastle 220–1w

Coaker Mr Vernon
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Crime (20.11.02) 730–2
Questions
Care homes, Fees and charges 241w
Health Professions Council, Fees and charges 238w
Industrial tribunals 258w

Coastal areas
Tourism 347–50

Coffee
Developing countries 193–4w

Coffey, Ms Ann
Questions
Electronic government 501

College of Arms
Conditions of employment 108w

Collins, Mr Tim
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Regional government (19.11.02) 606–9, 611
Questions
Maritime and Coastguard Agency 265w
Railways, Accidents 487

COM(2002)180
(21.11.02) 801–67

COM(2002)181
(21.11.02) 801–67

COM(2002)186
(21.11.02) 801–67

COM(2002)187
(21.11.02) 801–67

Combined heat and power
281w

Commercial activities
BBC 229–30w

Committee of Selection
(21.11.02) 868–84

Common agricultural policy
Reform 773–5

Communications Bill 2002/03
Debates etc.
1R (19.11.02) 520

Community Care (Delayed Discharges Etc) Bill 2002/03
Debates etc.
1R (14.11.02) 164

Commuters
Greater London 264–5w

Company cars
Taxation 273w

Competition
Grain 290w

Complementary medicine
Petitions (19.11.02) 616, (20.11.02) 755

Compost
155w

Comptroller and Auditor General
see National Audit Office

Compulsory purchase
125w, 225–6w

Computers
Broadcasting programmes 233w
Defence Logistics Organisation 214–5w
Ministry of Defence 117w

Conditions of employment
College of Arms 108w
Ministers of religion 361–2

Congo (Kinshasa)
see Democrat Republic of Congo

Connarty, Mr Michael
Debates etc.
Fisheries (21.11.02) 848–9
Questions
EC action 141–2w

Connex Rail
Franchises 184w

Conservation
Energy 187w

Constituencies
121–2w

Construction
Housing 119w
Roads 181w, 268–70w

Consultants
Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 155w

Contracts
NHS 204–5w

Convention on the Future of Europe
127w

Convention on the Future of Europe Standing Committee
(18.11.02) 474

Conway, Derek
Questions
London Underground, Crime 496

***Cook, Rt Hon Robin**, President of the Council and Leader of the House of Commons*
Questions
Business statements 127–39, 785–99
Members, Cycling 173w
Parliamentary scrutiny, Legislative drafting 44w

***Cooper, Ms Yvette**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Lord Chancellor's Dept*
Debates etc.
European Parliament (Representation) Bill, 1R (21.11.02) 800
Magistrates' courts, Sutton Coldfield (21.11.02) 906–8
Written Statements
Freedom of information 43ws
Questions
Electoral register 206–7w
Hacking, Lord Chancellor's Dept 207w
Magistrates' courts, York 208w
Members, Correspondence 251–2w
Sentencing, Rape 252w

Corbyn, Jeremy
Questions
Peru, Prisoners 46–7w
Railways, Finance 77w
Recycling, Greater London 283w

Cormack, Sir Patrick
Debates etc.
Fire services (21.11.02) 898
Queen's speech, Crime (20.11.02) 737–8
Questions
Birmingham Relief Road 500
Local Government Act 1988, Homosexuality 627

Council housing
4ws, 625–7
Greater London 226w
Rents 226w

Council of the Isles
see British Irish Council

Council tax
12–3ws, 123–4w

Councillors
11ws

Countryside
Access 6w

Countryside Agency
Finance 41w

Countryside stewardship scheme
6w

Cox, Mr Tom
Questions
Afghanistan, Detainees 127w
Armed forces, Manpower 222–3w
Council housing, Rents 226w
London Underground, Crime 495–6
Taiwan, EC external trade 47w

Cranston, Ross
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Health services (14.11.02) 213–5
Social security benefits (18.11.02) 374

Credit cards
Fraud 69w

Cricket
352–4

Crime
London Underground 495–6
Queen's speech (20.11.02) 647–755
Victims 641–2

Crime prevention
642–3
Driving offences 262w

Crimes of violence
Schools 59w
Teachers 61–2w

Criminal Assets Recovery Agency
see Assets Recovery Agency

Criminal Justice Bill 2002/03
Debates etc.
1R (21.11.02) 800

Croft, Alison
36–7w

Crossrail line
Finance 74w

Cryer, Mrs Ann
Debates etc.
Queen's speech (13.11.02) 114–7

Cunningham, Rt Hon Dr Jack
Debates etc.
Social security benefits (18.11.02) 376
Questions
Sports competitors, Finance 351

Cunningham, Mr Jim
Debates etc.
Bus services, Petitions (19.11.02) 617–8
Pensions, Petitions (19.11.02) 618
Queen's speech, Economic policy (18.11.02) 438, 460–2
Queen's speech, Health services (14.11.02) 179

Cunningham, Tony
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Economic policy (18.11.02) 400–1
Questions
Bassenthwaite Lake, Pollution 287w
Correspondence, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 41w
Physical education 357

Curry, Rt Hon David
Questions
Mortgages, VAT 189w

Curtis-Thomas, Ms Claire
Debates etc.
Sexual offences (19.11.02) 516

***Curtis-Thomas, Ms Claire**—continued*
Questions
Chemicals, Trade competitiveness 150–2w

Cycling
262–3w
Accidents 21w, 179w
Helmets 75w
Members 173w
Road traffic offences 246–8w

Cyprus
7–8w

Dalyell, Mr Tam
Debates etc.
Queen's speech (13.11.02) 29–30, 33
Questions
Business questions 132
Ministers, Codes of practice 504

***Darling, Rt Hon Alistair**, Secretary of State for Transport*
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Regional government (19.11.02) 609–12
Questions
Aviation 487–92
Aviation, Midlands 488–9
Aviation, Scotland 488–9
Fire services, Industrial disputes 74w
Railways, Accidents 485–7

Davey, Mr Edward
Debates etc.
Fire services (14.11.02) 147–8, (21.11.02) 890
Queen's speech, Regional government (19.11.02) 539–46
Questions
Compulsory purchase 125w, 225–6w
Fire services 25w, 81w
Housing, Empty property 120w
Income tax, Research 189w
Land 124w
Neighbourhood wardens, Finance 27–8w
Regional assemblies 630

Davey, Mrs Valerie
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Further education (21.11.02) 26–8wh

David, Mr Wayne
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Regional government (19.11.02) 528, 579–81

Davidson, Mr Ian
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Economic policy (18.11.02) 470
Questions
Common agricultural policy, Reform 773–4

Davies, Rt Hon Denzil
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Crime (20.11.02) 680–1
Questions
Convention on the Future of Europe 127w

Davies, Geraint
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Regional government (19.11.02) 522
Sexual offences (19.11.02) 518
Questions
Aviation 490–1

Davis, Rt Hon David
Debates etc.
Fire services (14.11.02) 142–5, (21.11.02) 886–8, 897

***Davis, Rt Hon David**—continued*
Queen's speech, Regional government (19.11.02) 521–30, 532
Questions
Departmental responsibilities 140w
Regional assemblies 629

Dawson, Mr Hilton
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Health services (14.11.02) 174, 182, 184
Queen's speech, Regional government (19.11.02) 534, 550, 557, 564–5, 578, 593, 600–1
Questions
Regional assemblies, North West region 628

D-Day landings
Anniversaries 35w

Dean, Mrs Janet
Questions
Teachers, Pay 63–7w

Death
Armed forces 113–5w, 118w

Debts
Rain forests 257w

Deer
Animal welfare 247w

Defence
Expenditure 224w

Defence Logistics Organisation
214w, 224w
Computers 214–5w

Defence Medical Services
14–6ws

Democratic Republic of Congo
Natural resources 8–9w
Peace negotiations 16w
Sexual offences 196w

***Denham, Rt Hon John**, Minister of State, Home Office*
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Crime (20.11.02) 742–5
Written Statements
Police 37–8ws
Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 8–9ws
Questions
Nottinghamshire Constabulary, Manpower 54w

Dental services
205w
Gosport 236–7w
Pay 237w

Departmental coordination
Environment protection 156–7w

Departmental responsibilities
140w
Children 137–8w

Deployment
Armed forces 14w

Dept for Culture Media and Sport
Hacking 170w
Older workers 170w
Research 232w
Tolls 169–70w

Dept for Education and Skills
Hacking 57w
Internet 55–6w

Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs
Consultants 155w

Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs—continued
Correspondence 41w
EC grants and loans 158w
Hacking 42w
Official cars 163–4w
Older workers 42w
Queen's speech (19.11.02) 521–616
Tolls 40–1w

Dept for International Development
Adam Smith Institute 2–4w
Hacking 199w
Pay 250w
Public expenditure 251w
Tolls 49w

Dept for Transport
Hacking 264w
Official cars 266w
Tolls 79–80w

Dept for Work and Pensions
Tolls 104w
Written questions (20.11.02) 645

Dept of Trade and Industry
Tolls 256–7w

Derbyshire
Local government finance (14.11.02) 252–60

Detainees
Afghanistan 127w

Developing countries
Coffee 193–4w
Drugs 250–1w
Education 14–6w, 50–1w
Health services 200w
Sub-Saharan Africa 193w
Sustainable development 49–50w
Water supply 51–2w, 200–1w

Development aid
250w

Devonport Dockyard
Security 215–6w

Dhanda, Mr Parmjit
Questions
Registration of births deaths and marriages, Digital technology 68w

Diabetes
34w, 101w

Digital broadcasting
BBC Worldwide 228–31w

Digital technology
Registration of births deaths and marriages 68w

Diplomatic service
USA 234w

Dir73/239/EEC
136

Dir2001/83/EC
(19.11.02) 616, (20.11.02) 755

Dir2002/46/EC
(19.11.02) 616, (20.11.02) 755

Disciplinary proceedings
Armed forces 115w
Doctors 204w
Veterinary services 167w

Discrimination
Age 104–5w, 632–3

Disease control
Bovine tuberculosis 154w, 282–3w
BSE 155w, 290w
EC grants and loans 40w
Foot and mouth disease 287w

Dismore, Mr Andrew
Questions
Civil servants, Ethnic groups 502–3
Cyprus 7–8w
Divorce (Religious Marriages) Act 2002 207w
Driving offences, Crime prevention 262w
Elgin Marbles 12w
Greece 170w
Hungary, Law 128w
Mortgages, Islam 70–1w

Disposable nappies
281w

Divorce (Religious Marriages) Act 2002
Questions
207w

Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Economic policy (18.11.02) 389, 395, 458–60

Dobbin, Jim
Questions
Gender selection 245w

Dobson, Rt Hon Frank
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Health services (14.11.02) 168, 170, 186, 194, 201–3, 206

Doctors
Disciplinary proceedings 204w

Dodds, Mr Nigel
Questions
Assets Recovery Agency, Northern Ireland 4w

Domestic violence
105w, 118w

Domestic wastes
Recycling 284w

Donaldson, Mr Jeffrey M
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Regional government (19.11.02) 582
Questions
British Irish Intergovernmental Secretariat 252–3w
Insurance, Financial services 273w
Peers 17w
Royal Irish Regiment, Manpower 37–8w

Donohoe, Mr Brian H
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Regional government (19.11.02) 555

Doran, Mr Frank
Debates etc.
Fisheries (21.11.02) 819, 827–32, 849

Doughty, Sue
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Regional government (19.11.02) 576–9
Questions
Environment protection, Business 282w
National service, Military decorations 36w
National service, Monuments 36w
Public expenditure 191w
Sports 13w

Drew, Mr David
Debates etc.
Fisheries (21.11.02) 803, 808
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Further education (21.11.02) 3wh
Questions
Meat, Smuggling 768

Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency
Standards 263w

Driving
Angina 79w

Driving offences
Crime prevention 262w

Drown, Ms Julia
Debates etc.
Sexual offences (19.11.02) 515
Questions
Bus services 75w

Drugs
Developing countries 250–1w

Duncan, Mr Alan
Debates etc.
Fire services (21.11.02) 892

Duncan, Mr Peter
Debates etc.
Fisheries (21.11.02) 807, 857–8
Questions
Bookmakers, Finance 168w
Business questions 797–8
Slaughter premium scheme 6–7w

Duncan Smith, Rt Hon Iain
Debates etc.
Queen's speech (13.11.02) 13–20, 28
Questions
Health services, NHS 635–6
Terrorism, Fire services 637–8
Terrorism, Health services 636

Dunwoody, Mrs Gwyneth
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Regional government (19.11.02) 541, 546–8
Questions
Transport, Finance 493

Dyslexia
56w

***Eagle, Maria**, Parliamentary Secretary, Department for Work and Pensions*
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Health services (14.11.02) 185
Questions
Tolls, Dept for Work and Pensions 104w

East Sussex
Illegal immigrants 130–1w

Eastern region
Regional planning and development 81w

EC action
141–2w
Arrest warrants 128w
Taxation 73w

EC aid
3w

EC enlargement
Foreign trade 255w
Overseas aid 1w

EC external trade
Taiwan 47w

EC Fisheries Council
282w

EC grants and loans
Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 158w
Disease control 40w

EC immigration
129–30w

EC law
Ministerial policy advisors 202–3w

Economic and monetary union
188w

Economic growth
70w

Economic policy
Queen's speech (18.11.02) 385–474

Eddisbury
Local government finance 57–8w, 71w

Education
Assessments 31w, 56w
Buckinghamshire 56–7w
Children in care 58w
Developing countries 14–6w, 50–1w
Finance 13–4ws, 30–1w
Overseas aid 49w
Queen's speech (15.11.02) 261–338

Edwards, Mr Huw
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Regional government (19.11.02) 550, 581, 604–6
Questions
Bovine tuberculosis 782–3
College of Arms, Conditions of employment 108w
Ministers of religion, Conditions of employment 361–2

Effala, Madeline
(19.11.02) 619–24

Efford, Clive
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Crime (20.11.02) 732–4
Questions
Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency, Standards 263w
Parking offences, Fines 21w, 90w
Roads, Tolls 492

Eggs
781–2

Eight minutes rule
Rulings and statements (20.11.02) 676

Elderly
Prescriptions 203w
Residential and nursing care see Care homes

Elections
Kenya 233–4w
Local government 33w

Electoral register
206–7w
Northern Ireland 253w

Electoral systems
Public participation 359–61

Electricity
Energy supply 109w
Power failures 108w, 110–2w

Electricity generation
152w

Electrification
Railways 183w

Electronic equipment
Waste disposal 782

Electronic government
43w, 501–2

Elgin Marbles
12w

Ellman, Mrs Louise
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Economic policy (18.11.02) 463–4
Queen's speech, Regional government (19.11.02) 594, 597

Ellman, Mrs Louise—continued
Questions
Asylum, Liverpool 54w
Walton Group, Liverpool 25–6w

Emergency calls
Fire services 84–6w

Emissions trading scheme
Aviation 175w

Employment
Leeds 185–6w

Employment Act 2002
Written Statements
44–5ws

Employment agencies
257w

Employment Rights Act 1996
Written Statements
44–5ws

Empty property
12ws
Housing 120w

Energy
Conservation 187w

Energy supply
Electricity 109w
Sustainable development 111–2w

English Sports Council
Finance 171w

Entertainments
Licensing 345–6

Entry clearances
47–8w
Ethiopia 47w

Environment Agency
Official cars 156w

Environment protection
138–9w
Business 282w
Departmental coordination 156–7w

Environment Protection (Duty of Care) Regulations 1991
Questions
284–5w

Environmental Protection Act 1990
Questions
771–3

Equal opportunities
Small businesses 151–2w

Equality
632

Equitable Life Independent Inquiry
23w

Eritrea
196–7w
International assistance 196w

Essex
Truancy 148w

Ethiopia
197–8w
Entry clearances 47w
Overseas aid 197w

Ethnic groups
Civil servants 502–4

European Bank for Reconstruction and Development
198w

European Central Bank
69w

European City of Culture
Birmingham 346–7
Newcastle upon Tyne 346

European Communities
see also EC headings

European Food Safety Authority
101w

European Parliament (Representation) Bill 2002/03
Debates etc.
1R (21.11.02) 800

Evans, Mr Nigel
Questions
Bus lanes 261w
Lancashire, Prime Minister 140w
Rural Payments Agency, Finance 296w

Ewing, Annabelle
Questions
BBC, Scotland 10w
EC Fisheries Council 282w

Excise duties
Aviation 68w, 187–8w
Bus services 2ws
Fuels 780–1

Exhaust emissions
178–9w, 263–4w

Exports
Thailand 153w

Exservicemen
Angola 194w
New Zealand 36w
Radiation exposure 36w, 220w

Extradition Bill 2002/03
Debates etc.
1R (14.11.02) 163–4
Questions
19w

Fabricant, Michael
Questions
Birmingham Relief Road 499
Cathedrals, Repairs and maintenance 364
Electoral systems, Public participation 360
Film 355–6
Fire services, Industrial disputes 122–3w
Iraq, Armed conflict 644

Fallon, Mr Michael
Debates etc.
Fire services (14.11.02) 155

Fares
Railways 184w

Farmers
see also Agriculture
Age 157w

Farms
see also Agriculture
Diversification 155w

Farrelly, Paul
Questions
Care homes, Assessments 99–100w
Transport, Staffordshire 498

Females
Public appointments 43–4w

Fertility
Males 238w

Field, Rt Hon Frank
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Health services (14.11.02) 244–5
Social security benefits (18.11.02) 371
Questions
Annuities 279w

Field, Rt Hon Frank—continued
MMR vaccine 102w
Social security benefits, Expenditure 279w

Fiji
Foreign workers 216–7w

Film
354–6

Financial services
Insurance 273w

Fines
Parking offences 21w, 90w

Fire services
25w, 81w
Armed forces 113w, 211w, 217–8w, 221w
Buckinghamshire 85w
Emergency calls 84–6w
Industrial disputes 74w, 122–3w, 255w, 273w, 634–5, 639–40
Manpower 82–5w
Ministerial statements (14.11.02) 140–63, (21.11.02) 885–900
Northern Ireland 217w
Pay 273–4w
Terrorism 637–8

Fire stations
York 124–5w

Fisheries
775–7, (21.11.02) 801–67
Compensation 19–20w
Petitions (14.11.02) 251
Scotland 287w

Flexible Working (Procedural Requirements) Regulations 2002
Written Statements
44–5ws

Flight, Mr Howard
Questions
Fire services, Industrial disputes 273w
Fire services, Pay 273–4w
Government departments, Standards 276–7w
Iraq, Armed conflict 274w
London Underground, Public private partnerships 274w
Minimum wage 274–5w
National Air Traffic Services, Industrial disputes 274w
National Audit Office 72w
Network Rail 275w
Private finance initiative 277–8w
Public finance 72w

Flint, Caroline
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Crime (20.11.02) 688, 706–8

Flood control
291w
Finance 156w

Floods
Housing 156w
Moray 641
Statistics 288–9w

Flook, Mr Adrian
Questions
Prescriptions 243–4w

Fly tipping
283–4w

Food
Labelling 291–2w

Food aid
Zimbabwe 251w

Food composition
Poultry meat 242–3w

Food supply
Africa 1–2w

Foot and mouth disease
Disease control 287w

Football Association
12–3w

Foreign and Commonwealth Office
Hacking 9w
Older workers 45w
Tolls 45w

Foreign trade
EC enlargement 255w

Foreign workers
Fiji 216–7w
Nurses 205–6w

Foreigners
Patients 241w

Forth, Mr Eric
Debates etc.
Business questions intervention (21.11.02) 790
Committee of Selection (21.11.02) 877–80, 882
Fire services (21.11.02) 897
Ministerial statements, Points of order (14.11.02) 200–1, (20.11.02) 645–6
Queen's speech, Health services (14.11.02) 171
Questions
Business statements 127–30, 785–8

Foster, Mr Don
Debates etc.
Queen's speech (13.11.02) 48–9, 68
Queen's speech, Regional government (19.11.02) 607
Questions
Bus services 261w
Railways, Accidents 486
Roads, Construction 268–70w
Rural areas, Roads 181w
Schools, Transport 54–5w
Strategic Rail Authority 22w, 267–8w
Strategic Rail Authority, Standards 271–2w
Transport, Schools 270–1w

Foster care
101w

Foulkes, Rt Hon George
Debates etc.
Business questions intervention (21.11.02) 786
Fisheries (21.11.02) 811, 813
Members, Points of order (18.11.02) 383
Queen's speech, Addresses to the Crown (13.11.02) 6–9
Social security benefits (18.11.02) 377
Questions
Fisheries 776–7

Fox, Dr Liam
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Health services (14.11.02) 180–90, 194, 248
Questions
Budget April 2002, Leaflets 71w
Heart diseases 236w
NHS, Sick leave 245w

France
Beef 139w
Frontiers 5ws

Franchises
Connex Rail 184w

Francois, Mr Mark
Questions
Business questions 799
Meat, Smuggling 767–8

Fraud
Credit cards 69w
Social security benefits 41–2ws

Freedom of information
43ws

Freedom of Information Act 2000
Written Statements
43ws

Frontiers
France 5ws

Fuels
Excise duties 780–1

Functions of Traffic Wardens (Amendment) Order 2002
Debates etc.
(20.11.02) 755

Furs
Petitions (19.11.02) 616–7

Further education
(21.11.02) 1–44wh

Future Builders' Fund
69–70w

Gaming machines
45ws

Gapes, Mike
Questions
Job creation, Solar power 258w

Gardiner, Mr Barry
Debates etc.
Fire services (14.11.02) 155–6
Ministerial statements, Points of order (21.11.02) 900
Queen's speech (13.11.02) 16
Queen's speech, Education (15.11.02) 275, 285–6, 302–3, 308–13

Garnier, Mr Edward
Debates etc.
Fire services (14.11.02) 152
Queen's speech (13.11.02) 29
Queen's speech, Health services (14.11.02) 168, 233–5, 247

Gas supply
see Natural gas

Gender selection
245w

Genetically modified organisms
292w

George, Andrew
Debates etc.
Fisheries (21.11.02) 803, 808–9, 818, 832–6
Queen's speech, Regional government (19.11.02) 558, 580
Questions
Agriculture, Pollution 167w
Beef, France 139w
BSE, Disease control 155w
Common agricultural policy, Reform 775
EC grants and loans, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 158w
Exports, Thailand 153w
Farmers, Age 157w
Farms, Diversification 155w
Livestock, Insurance 162–3w
Livestock, Waste disposal 290–1w
Local heritage initiative 163w
Offal, Imports 292–4w
Organic farming 164w

***George, Andrew**—continued*
Poultry, Imports 295–6w
Regional selective assistance, South West region 111w
Rural areas, Housing 165–6w
Urban areas, Finance 227–8w
Veterinary services 298w
Veterinary services, Disciplinary proceedings 167w

Gibb, Mr Nick
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Education (15.11.02) 263, 268, 320–5
Social security benefits (18.11.02) 374

Gibraltar
Sovereignty 17w

Gibson, Dr Ian
Questions
National Institute for Mental Health 239w
Students, Fees and charges 148w

Gidley, Sandra
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Crime (20.11.02) 690–1, 725
Sexual offences (19.11.02) 514–5
Questions
Abortion 96–7w
Bed and breakfast accommodation, Expenditure 80w
Doctors, Disciplinary proceedings 204w
Domestic violence 105w
Fertility, Males 238w
Internet, Dept for Education and Skills 55–6w
Patients, Prospectuses 241–2w
Personal and social education, Training 147w

Gillan, Mrs Cheryl
Questions
Arson, Buckinghamshire 80w
Buckinghamshire County Council, Standards 91–2w
Business, Regional planning and development 149w
Education, Buckinghamshire 56–7w
Fire services, Buckinghamshire 85w
Health services, Buckinghamshire 239–40w
Higher education 142w
Hospital beds, Buckinghamshire 235–6w
Housing, Low incomes 225w
Local government finance, Buckinghamshire 87–8w, 126w
Non-teaching staff, Buckinghamshire 61w
Schools, Buckinghamshire 59–60w
Secondary education, Buckinghamshire 60w
Teachers, Buckinghamshire 60w, 67w

Golden Jubilee 2002
see Queen Elizabeth II, Anniversaries

Goodman, Mr Paul
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Health services (14.11.02) 169, 177, 208, 240–2
Questions
Local government finance 121w

Gosport
Dental services 236–7w

Government Car and Despatch Agency
202w

Government departments
Accountancy 187w
Disclosure of information 18w
Legal opinion 18w
Security 43w

***Government departments**—continued*
Standards 43w, 276–7w

"Government Response to Report on the Employment Tribunal System Taskforce"
1ws

Grain
Competition 290w

Gray, Mr James
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Economic policy (18.11.02) 429
Questions
Bus services 497
Countryside Agency, Finance 41w
Deer, Animal welfare 247w
Future Builders' Fund 69–70w
Hunting, Research 159–62w
Livestock, Transport 767
Rural areas 42–3w

Grayling, Chris
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Economic policy (18.11.02) 387, 393, 410–1, 413–4, 462–3, 472
Questions
Livestock, Transport 766–7

Greater London
Commuters 264–5w
Council housing 226w
Military bases 215w, 219–20w
Olympic Games 14w
Recycling 283w
Road traffic 180w
Roads 21w, 266w
Taxis 258–9w

Greece
170w

Green, Mr Damian
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Education (15.11.02) 274–87, 336

Green, Matthew
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Regional government (19.11.02) 526
Questions
Regional assemblies 633

Green Ministers Committee
158w

Greenway, Mr John
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Education (15.11.02) 267
Questions
Playing fields, Planning permission 232w
Sports, Finance 171–2w, 228w
Sports competitors, Finance 352
Television, Licensing 171w

Grieve, Mr Dominic
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Crime (20.11.02) 656
Questions
Local government finance, Buckinghamshire 126w

Griffiths, Jane
Questions
Air conditioning, Treasury 73–4w
Business questions 794
Green Ministers Committee 158w
10 Downing Street, Air conditioning 254w

***Griffiths, Nigel**, Parliamentary Secretary, Dept of Trade and Industry*
Questions
BAE Systems, Arms trade 149w

***Griffiths, Nigel**—continued*
Business links, Advertising 256w
Exports, Thailand 153w
Fisheries, Compensation 19–20w
Small businesses; Equal opportunities 151–2w

Griffiths, Mr Win
Questions
Fire services, Industrial disputes 122w

Grogan, Mr John
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Education (15.11.02) 316–20

Guided weapons
China 47w

Gurkhas
218–9w

Hacking
Cabinet Office 209w
Dept for Culture Media and Sport 170w
Dept for Education and Skills 57w
Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 42w
Dept for International Development 199w
Dept for Transport 264w
Foreign and Commonwealth Office 9w
Lord Chancellor's Dept 207w
Ministry of Defence 116–7w
Treasury 74w

Hague, Rt Hon William
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Regional government (19.11.02) 548–51

***Hain, Rt Hon Peter**, Secretary of State for Wales*
Debates etc.
Health (Wales) Bill, 1R (14.11.02) 163
Questions
Tolls, Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 96w

Hare Krishna
Religious buildings 226w

***Harman, Rt Hon Harriet**, Solicitor-General*
Questions
Fire services, Industrial disputes 255w

Harris, Dr Evan
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Health services (14.11.02) 173, 193–200
Questions
A34, Repairs and maintenance 75–6w
Business questions 137, 796–7
Chess 357–8
Local Government Act 1988, Homosexuality 627
Mental health services 34w
Physiotherapy, Registration 242w

Harris, Mr Tom
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Crime (20.11.02) 726, 738
Queen's speech, Economic policy (18.11.02) 405
Questions
Business questions 797

Harvey, Nick
Questions
Entertainments, Licensing 346
Research, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 232w

Hawkins, Mr Nick
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Crime (20.11.02) 667, 672
Questions
Fire services, Industrial disputes 255w
Sports, Finance 228w
Sports competitors, Finance 230w, 350–1

Hayes, Mr John
Debates etc.
Fisheries (21.11.02) 804, 815–27, 861–2
Questions
Livestock, Transport 771

Heald, Mr Oliver
Questions
Pensions, Lord Chancellor's Dept 93w

***Healey, John**, Economic Secretary, Treasury*
Debates etc.
North Sea oil (13.11.02) 121–6
Questions
Climate change levy, Nuclear power 186w
Excise duties, Aviation 68w, 187–8w
Indirect taxation 186–7w
Social security benefits, Minimum wage 186w
Taxation, Company cars 273w
VAT 187w
VAT, Mortgages 189w
VAT, Musical instruments 23w
World Bank 192–3w
World Bank, Public appointments 191–2w

Health
38ws
Africa 194w
Armed forces 219w

Health hazards
206w

Health Professions Council
Fees and charges 238w

Health services
Buckinghamshire 239–40w
Developing countries 200w
NHS 635–6
Queen's speech (14.11.02) 166–250
Terrorism 636
Warrington 246w

Health (Wales) Bill 2002/03
Debates etc.
1R (14.11.02) 163

Heart diseases
236w

Heath, Mr David
Debates etc.
Fire services (14.11.02) 158
Ministerial statements, Points of order. (21.11.02) 899–900
Queen's speech, Crime (20.11.02) 664
Questions
Cricket 354
Fuels, Excise duties 781

Heathcoat-Amory, Rt Hon David
Questions
Business questions 132–3

Heathrow Airport
264w

Helmets
Cycling 75w

Henderson, Mr Ivan
Questions
Afghanistan 44w
Arthritis 235w

***Henderson, Mr Ivan**—continued*
Central Africa, Politics and government 234w
D-Day landings, Anniversaries 35w
Pre-Budget report 2002 1w
Rwanda 51w
Shipping, Taxation 80w
Truancy, Essex 148w

Hendrick, Mr Mark
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Economic policy (18.11.02) 417, 437, 442
Queen's speech, Regional government (19.11.02) 527

Hendry, Mr Charles
Questions
Physical education 356

Hepatitis
101–2w

Hepburn, Mr Stephen
Questions
Cricket 353–4

Hermon, Lady
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Crime (20.11.02) 693–4
Questions
Police, Northern Ireland 640

Heroin
247–8w

***Hewitt, Rt Hon Ms Patricia**, Secretary of State for Trade and Industry*
Debates etc.
Industrial Development (Financial Assistance) Bill, 1R (18.11.02) 384
Queen's speech, Economic policy (18.11.02) 469–73
Questions
Domestic violence 105w
Foreign trade, EC enlargement 255w
India 257–8w
Members, Correspondence 258w
Rain forests, Debts 257w
Tolls, Dept of Trade and Industry 256–7w

Higher education
142w, 643–4
Finance 57w, 142w

HIV infection
Zimbabwe 198w

HMS Trafalgar
116w

Hoban, Mr Mark
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Crime (20.11.02) 725–7
Questions
NHS Bank 240w
Public finance 272w
Social security benefits, Post offices 279–80w
Train operating companies, Standards 76w

***Hodge, Margaret**, Minister of State for Universities, Dept for Education and Skills*
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Further education (21.11.02) 1–10wh, 14wh, 18wh, 30wh, 41–4wh
Questions
EC action 141–2w
Higher education 142w
Higher education, Finance 57w, 142w
Learning and Skills Council for England, Resignations 142–4w
Learning and skills councils 145–6w
Students, Fees and charges 148w

Hoey, Miss Kate
Debates etc.
Fire services (21.11.02) 889–90

Hogg, Rt Hon Douglas
Debates etc.
Business questions intervention (14.11.02) 137
Fire services (14.11.02) 157
Sexual offences (19.11.02) 515
Questions
Regional assemblies 630–1

Holmes, Paul
Debates etc.
Social security benefits (18.11.02) 378

Home Affairs Select Committee
(18.11.02) 474

Homelessness
26w, 125–6w

Homelessness Act 2002
Questions
26w

Homosexuality
Adoption 97–8w
Local Government Act 1988 627

***Hoon, Rt Hon Geoffrey**, Secretary of State for Defence*
Written Statements
"Ministry of Defence Performance Report, 2001/02" 46ws
Questions
Iraq, Weapons 116w

Hopkins, Mr Kelvin
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Economic policy (18.11.02) 416, 419
Questions
Railways, Accidents 486

Horam, Mr John
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Health services (14.11.02) 224–6
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Further education (21.11.02) 29–30wh

Horticulture
Northern Ireland 48w

Horticulture Research International
42w

Hospital beds
100–1w
Buckinghamshire 235–6w
Norfolk 644

House of Commons Commission
Tolls 148w

House of Commons sessional orders
(13.11.02) 1–2

House of Lords
Bishops 24w

"House Returns, 2001/02"
(20.11.02) 625

Housing
Asylum 133–4w
Chesham 225w
Construction 119w
Empty property 120w
Floods 156w
Low incomes 225w
Northern Ireland Prison Service 254w
Northern region 118–9w
Prisoners' release 28w
Private sector 119–20w
Rural areas 119w, 165–6w

Housing benefit
153–4w
Supported housing 154w

Housing revenue accounts
8–9ws

Howard, Rt Hon Michael
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Economic policy (18.11.02) 399–408, 472
Questions
Economic and monetary union 188w
Economic growth 70w

Howarth, Mr George
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Crime (20.11.02) 651, 662–4
Questions
Transport, Finance 494–5

Howarth, Mr Gerald
Questions
Submarines 221w

***Howells, Dr Kim**, Parliamentary Secretary, Dept for Culture Media and Sport*
Questions
Arts, Young people 13–4w
BBC 169w
BBC, Commercial activities 229–30w
BBC, Finance 229w
BBC, Scotland 10w
BBC News 24 Review 169w
BBC Worldwide, Digital broadcasting 228–31w
Bletchley Park, Museums and galleries 230w
Broadcasting programmes, Independent producers 231w
Entertainments, Licensing 345–6
Film 354–6
Hacking, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 170w
Licensing laws 10–1w
Licensing laws, Young people 12w
Local broadcasting, Radio 13w
Mass media 13w
Mass media, Ownership 170–1w
Museum of the Moving Image 231–2w
Older workers, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 170w
Research, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 232w
Sports, Lotto 171w
Television, Licensing 169w, 172w, 232–4w
Tolls, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 169–70w
Tolls, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 169w
Tourism, Coastal areas 347–50
Tourism, Marketing 11–2w
UK Sport, Finance 171w

Hoyle, Mr Lindsay
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Crime (20.11.02) 728–9
Questions
Ministers, Codes of practice 504

***Hughes, Beverley**, Minister of State, Home Office*
Debates etc.
Effala, Madeline (19.11.02) 621–4
Written Statements
Asylum, Finance 2ws
Questions
Asylum, Children 129w
Asylum, Housing 133–4w

***Hughes, Beverley**—continued*
Asylum, Liverpool 54w
Illegal immigrants, East Sussex 130–1w
Illegal immigrants, Northern Ireland 128–9w
Immigration, Marriage 132–4w
Members, Correspondence 53–4w

Hughes, Mr Kevin Michael
Debates etc.
Fire services (14.11.02) 153, (21.11.02) 891
Queen's speech, Health services (14.11.02) 173

Hughes, Simon
Debates etc.
Queen's speech (13.11.02) 24–5
Queen's speech, Crime (20.11.02) 655, 659, 666–76, 743
Sexual offences (19.11.02) 509–10
Questions
Local government, Elections 33w
Road traffic control 78w

"Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority Annual Report and Accounts, 2002"
238w

Human trafficking
130w

Humble, Mrs Joan
Debates etc.
Fisheries (21.11.02) 809, 817
Social security benefits (18.11.02) 372–3
Questions
Tourism, Coastal areas 347

Hungary
Law 128w

Hunting
Research 159–62w

Hurst, Mr Alan
Questions
Countryside stewardship scheme 6w
Electricity, Power failures 110–1w
Grain, Competition 290w

***Hutton, Rt Hon John**, Minister of State, Dept of Health*
Written Statements
NHS, Training 46ws
Questions
Doctors, Disciplinary proceedings 204w
Health Professions Council, Fees and charges 238w
Junior doctors, Manpower 204w
Junior doctors, Working hours 238–9w
NHS, Contracts 204–5w
NHS, Finance 205w
NHS, Sick leave 245w
Nurses, Foreign workers 205–6w
Physiotherapy, Registration 242w
Prescriptions, Elderly 203w

Hydroelectric power
Scotland 109w

Iddon, Dr Brian
Debates etc.
Complementary medicine, Petitions (19.11.02) 616
Oral question time intervention (18.11.02) 352
Queen's speech, Health services (14.11.02) 170
Questions
Business questions 136
Cricket 352–3
Prescriptions 243w
Prescriptions, Elderly 203w

Ilford
Non-teaching staff 55w

Illegal immigrants
East Sussex 130–1w
Northern Ireland 128–9w

Illsley, Mr Eric
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Crime (20.11.02) 691–3
Questions
Lead, Pollution control 765–6

Immigration
Manual workers 95–6w
Marriage 132–4w

Imports
Offal 292–4w
Poultry 295–6w

"In Demand"
2–3ws

In vitro fertilisation
238w

Incentives
Territorial Army 38–9w, 222w

Income tax
70w
Research 189w

Independent producers
Broadcasting programmes 231w

India
257–8w

Indirect taxation
186–7w

Industrial Development (Financial Assistance) Bill 2002/03
Debates etc.
1R (18.11.02) 384

Industrial diseases
Mining 109w, 112w

Industrial disputes
Fire services 74w, 122–3w, 255w, 273w, 634–5, 639–40
National Air Traffic Services 274w

Industrial tribunals
258w

Information services
Ministry of Defence 211–2w

Infrastructure
Transport 266–7w

***Ingram, Rt Hon Adam**, Minister of State, Ministry of Defence*
Questions
Afghanistan, Peace keeping operations 209w
Armed forces 211–3w
Armed forces, Fire services 211w, 217–8w, 221w
Armed forces, Manpower 223–4w
Army, British citizenship 209–10w
Baton rounds 210–1w
Chiefs of staff 212w
Defence, Expenditure 224w
Defence Logistics Organisation 214w, 224w
Defence Logistics Organisation, Computers 214–5w
Devonport Dockyard, Security 215–6w
Fiji, Foreign workers 216–7w
HMS Trafalgar 116w
Information services, Ministry of Defence 211–2w
Military attaches 214w
Operation Sandcastle 220–1w
Riot control weapons, Training 219w

***Ingram, Rt Hon Adam**—continued*
Security Forces Collusion with Loyalist Terrorists Inquiry 209w
Submarines 221w
Warships 223w

Insulation
Rented housing 226–7w

Insurance
Financial services 273w
Livestock 162–3w

Intelligence services
Accountancy 19w

International assistance
Afghanistan 249w
Burma 248–9w
Eritrea 196w

International Bank for Recondtruction and Development
see World Bank

International Development Select Committee
(18.11.02) 474

International Monetary Fund
192–3w

Internet
Dept for Education and Skills 55–6w

Intimidation
Armed forces 14w

Investment trusts
73w, 188w

Iraq
635
Armed conflict 274w, 638–9, 644
Weapons 116w

Irranca-Davies, Huw
Debates etc.
Social security benefits (18.11.02) 380
Questions
Churches, VAT 25w, 358–9
Foot and mouth disease, Disease control 287w
Nurses, Foreign workers 205–6w

Islam
Mortgages 70–1w

Isle of Wight
Revenue support grant 86–7w

Islington
Social security benefits 41–2ws

Israel
Arms trade 233w

Ivory
289–90w

Jack, Rt Hon Michael
Debates etc.
Fire services (14.11.02) 160
Questions
Business questions 795

Jackson, Ms Glenda
Debates etc.
Fire services (14.11.02) 149
Queen's speech, Health services (14.11.02) 176, 184, 189, 222–4

Jackson, Helen
Questions
Iraq 635
Public transport, Travel information 77w

***Jamieson, Mr David**, Parliamentary Secretary, Dept for Transport*
Written Statements
Bus services, Excise duties 2ws

***Jamieson, Mr David**—continued*
Questions
A34, Repairs and maintenance 75–6w
A249 259w
Air displays, Accidents 79w
Air routes, USA 181w
Air traffic 180–1w
Air traffic, Research 174–5w, 179w
Aircraft, Noise 175–7w
Airports 185w, 260w
Airports, Fees and charges 178w
Airports, Landing rights 180w
Airports, Rugby Warwickshire 76w
Airports, Security 259w
Airports, South East region 78w
Aviation 20w
Aviation, Air pollution 178w
Aviation, Emissions trading scheme 175w
Aviation, Security 177–8w
Bicycles 262w
Birmingham Airport 20w
Blue badge scheme 21w
Bridges, Chelmsford 498–9
Bus lanes 261w
Bus services 75w, 261w, 500
Bypasses, A6 75w
Channel tunnel railway line 262w
Connex Rail, Franchises 184w
Crossrail line, Finance 74w
Cycling 262–3w
Cycling, Accidents 21w, 179w
Cycling, Helmets 75w
Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency, Standards 263w
Driving, Angina 79w
Driving offences, Crime prevention 262w
Exhaust emissions 178–9w
Hacking, Dept for Transport 264w
Heathrow Airport 264w
M10 78w
Maritime and Coastguard Agency 265w
Merchant shipping 265w
Parking offences, Fines 21w
Public transport, Pressure groups 78w
Public transport, Travel information 77w
Railtrack, Finance 77w
Railway stations 183w
Railway stations, Manchester 74w
Railways, Accidents 22w
Railways, Electrification 183w
Railways, Fares 184w
Railways, Finance 77w
Railways, Lewes 75w
Railways, North West region 77w
Road traffic 183–4w
Road traffic control 78w
Roads, Accidents 173–4w
Roads, Construction 181w, 268–70w
Roads, Tolls 492–3
Shipping, Taxation 80w
Speed limits, Road signs and markings 271w
Speed limits, Urban areas 271w
Stagecoach Holdings 78w
Strategic Rail Authority 22w, 267–8w
Strategic Rail Authority, Standards 271–2w
Taxis, Greater London 258–9w
Tolls, Dept for Transport 79–80w
Train operating companies, Standards 76w
Transport 260–1w
Transport, Costs 184–5w
Transport, Infrastructure 266–7w
Transport, Radioactive materials 181–2w
Transport, Schools 270–1w
Transport, Staffordshire 498
West coast railway line 76w

Jenkin, Mr Bernard
Questions
Afghanistan, Peace keeping operations 209w
Armed forces, Fire services 217w
Armed forces, Recruitment 38w
Computers, Ministry of Defence 117w
Defence, Expenditure 224w
Defence Logistics Organisation 214w, 224w
Defence Logistics Organisation, Computers 214–5w
Fire services, Armed forces 113w
Information services, Ministry of Defence 211–2w
Iraq, Weapons 116w

Jenkins, Mr Brian
Questions
Birmingham Relief Road 499–500

Job creation
Solar power 258w

***Johnson, Alan**, Minister of State for Employment Relations and Regions, Dept of Trade and Industry*
Debates etc.
Renewable energy (20.11.02) 760–4
Written Statements
Government Response to Report on the Employment Tribunal System Taskforce 1ws
Regional development agencies, Public appointments 43–4ws
"Regional Development Agencies Reported Outputs First Quarter 2002/03" 39–41ws
Working hours 44–5ws
Questions
Age, Discrimination 104–5w
ASW Sheerness 106w
Business, Regional planning and development 149w
Chemicals, Trade competitiveness 150–2w
College of Arms, Conditions of employment 108w
Employment agencies 257w
Industrial tribunals 258w
Minimum wage 274–5w
Regional development agencies 105w
Regional selective assistance, South West region 111w
Summertime 123w

Johnson, Mr Boris
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Crime (20.11.02) 697–9

Jones, Helen M
Questions
Health services, Warrington 246w
North Cheshire Hospitals NHS Trust, Public relations 240–1w

Jones, Mr Jon Owen
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Crime (20.11.02) 697, 717–9

Jones, Mr Kevan
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Education (15.11.02) 279–80, 288, 295, 325–8, 332

Jones, Dr Lynne
Debates etc.
Fire services (14.11.02) 150, (21.11.02) 899
Questions
Asylum, Housing 133–4w
Homelessness 26w
Landlords, Water charges 127w

Jones, Dr Lynne*—*continued
Prisoners' release, Housing 28w

Jowell, Rt Hon Ms Tessa*, *Secretary of State for Culture Media and Sport
Debates etc.
Communications Bill, 1R (19.11.02) 520
Queen's speech, Education (15.11.02) 334–8
Written Statements
Gaming machines 45ws
Radio 3–4ws
Questions
Elgin Marbles 12w
European City of Culture, Birmingham 346–7
European City of Culture, Newcastle upon Tyne 346
Greece 170w
Lotto 10w
Museums and galleries 12w
Physical education 356–7

Junior doctors
Manpower 204w
Working hours 238–9w

Kaufman, Rt Hon Gerald
Debates etc.
Queen's speech (13.11.02) 17
Questions
Members, Correspondence 251–2w

Keetch, Mr Paul
Questions
Armed forces 211–3w
Armed forces, Manpower 223–4w
Military attaches 214w
Territorial Army, Incentives 38–9w

Kelly, Ruth*, *Financial Secretary, Treasury
Questions
Advertising, Treasury 67–8w
Air conditioning, Treasury 73–4w
Annuities 22–3w
Banks, Licensing 272w
Credit cards, Fraud 69w
EC immigration 129–30w
Economic and monetary union 188w
Economic growth 70w
Employment, Leeds 185–6w
Equitable Life Independent Inquiry 23w
European Central Bank 69w
Fire services, Industrial disputes 273w
Fire services, Pay 273–4w
Government departments, Standards 276–7w
Grants, Treasury 188w
Hacking, Treasury 74w
Immigration, Manual workers 95–6w
Insurance, Financial services 273w
Investment trusts 73w, 188w
Iraq, Armed conflict 274w
Life expectancy 71w
London Underground, Public private partnerships 274w
Maundy money, Costs 189w
Mortgage Direct 72w
Mortgages, Islam 70–1w
National Air Traffic Services, Industrial disputes 274w
Network Rail 275w
Office for National Statistics 72–3w, 275–6w
Private finance initiative 191w, 276–8w
Public expenditure 191w
Public finance 272w
Public Sector Classification Committee 190–1w
Registration of births deaths and marriages, Digital technology 68w

Kelly, Ruth*—*continued
Stability Pact 73w
Suicide 278w
Tax credit, Pensions 276w
Taxation, EC action 73w
Terrorism, Finance 278w
Tolls, Treasury 95w

Kennedy, Rt Hon Charles
Debates etc.
Queen's speech (13.11.02) 30–8
Questions
Iraq, Armed conflict 638–9

Kennedy, Jane*, *Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office
Questions
Northern Ireland Prison Service, Housing 254w
Secondary education, Northern Ireland 203w
Tolls, Northern Ireland Office 253w

Kent
Airports 638

Kenya
Elections 233–4w

Kettering
Child tax credit 68–9w

Khabra, Mr Piara S
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Crime (20.11.02) 723–5

Kidney, Mr David
Debates etc.
Social security benefits (18.11.02) 379–80
Questions
Housing, Empty property 120w

King, Andy
Debates etc.
Queen's speech (13.11.02) 19

King, Ms Oona
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Addresses to the Crown (13.11.02) 10–3
Questions
Ethiopia, Entry clearances 47w
Rented housing, Insulation 226–7w

Kirkbride, Miss Julie
Debates etc.
Sexual offences (19.11.02) 512
Questions
European City of Culture, Birmingham 346–7

Kirkwood, Mr Archy
Debates etc.
Social security benefits (18.11.02) 373
Questions
Tolls, House of Commons Commission 148w

Knight, Rt Hon Greg
Questions
Electoral register 206–7w
Electronic government 501

Knight, Jim
Debates etc.
Queen's speech (13.11.02) 17
Queen's speech, Regional government (19.11.02) 523, 554
Questions
Broadband 149–50w
Tourism, Coastal areas 350

Labelling
Food 291–2w

Ladyman, Dr Stephen
Debates etc.
Woodbridge, Jeff (18.11.02) 475–9, 482, 484

Lamb, Norman
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Regional government (19.11.02) 538, 575, 601–4
Questions
Avient Air 44–5w
BAE Systems, Arms trade 149w
Bredenkamp, John 9–10w
Business questions 138–9
Central Africa, Overseas aid 16w
Democratic Republic of Congo, Natural resources 8–9w
Electricity, Energy supply 109w
Electricity, Power failures 108w
Hospital beds, Norfolk 644
Local government finance, Rural areas 25–7w
Zimbabwe, Arms trade 9w
Zimbabwe, Sanctions 9w

Lammy, David*, *Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Dept of Health
Questions
Dental services 205w
Dental services, Pay 237w
Diabetes 34w, 101w
Mid Essex Hospital Services NHS Trust, Waiting lists 239w
Patients, Prospectuses 241–2w
Prescriptions 243–4w
Prescriptions, Fees and charges 206w

Lancashire
Prime Minister 140w

Land
124w

Landing rights
Airports 180w

Landlords
Water charges 127w

Lansley, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Health services (14.11.02) 172–3
Questions
Business questions 138

Law
Hungary 128w

Laws, Mr David
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Economic policy (18.11.02) 460
Questions
Chiefs of staff 212w

Lazarowicz, Mr Mark
Questions
Common agricultural policy, Reform 774–5
Social Exclusion Unit 120w

Lead
Pollution control 765–6

Learning and Skills Council for England
Resignations 142–4w

Learning and skills councils
145–6w

"Learning for Everyone Green Paper"
46ws

Leeds
Employment 185–6w

Legal opinion
Government departments 18w

Legislative drafting
Parliamentary scrutiny 44w

Leigh, Mr Edward
Questions
Local government finance, Lincolnshire 27w
Local government finance, Rural areas 27w

***Leslie, Mr Christopher**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister*
Debates etc.
Local government finance, Derbyshire (14.11.02) 256–60
Questions
Arson, Buckinghamshire 80w
Buckinghamshire County Council, Standards 91–2w
Council tax 123w
Fire services 81w
Fire services, Buckinghamshire 85w
Fire services, Emergency calls 84–6w
Fire services, Industrial disputes 634–5
Fire services, Manpower 82–5w
Fire stations, York 124–5w
Local government finance 121–2w
Parish councils 88–90w
Parking offences, Fines 90w
Tolls, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 81w

Letwin, Rt Hon Oliver
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Crime (20.11.02) 647–55, 660, 662–3, 669, 743
Sexual offences (19.11.02) 507–8

Levitt, Mr Tom
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Crime (20.11.02) 734–5
Queen's speech, Health services (14.11.02) 177–8
Social security benefits (18.11.02) 378

Lewes
Railways 75w

***Lewis, Mr Ivan**, Parliamentary Secretary, Dept for Education and Skills*
Questions
Hacking, Dept for Education and Skills 57w
Schools, Sports 146–7w

Lewis, Dr Julian
Debates etc.
Ministers, Points of order (21.11.02) 799–800
Queen's speech (13.11.02) 34, 43
Queen's speech, Health services (14.11.02) 171–2
Sexual offences (19.11.02) 519
Questions
Business questions 132, 798
Civil servants, Ethnic groups 503
Fire services, Industrial disputes 74w
Government departments, Security 43w
Housing, Rural areas 119w
Police stations, Northern Ireland 136w

Libraries
see Public libraries

Licensing laws
10–1w
Young people 12w

***Liddell, Rt Hon Mrs Helen**, Secretary of State for Scotland*
Questions
Tolls, Scotland Office 94w

Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
Questions
Ministerial statements 18w
Queen's speech, Press releases 19w

Lidington, Mr David
Questions
Meat, Smuggling 769–70
Rendering industry 295w
Social services, Fees and charges 245w

Life expectancy
71w

Lilley, Rt Hon Peter
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Health services (14.11.02) 166–7, 210–3
Questions
EC immigration 129–30w
Excise duties, Aviation 68w
Immigration, Manual workers 95–6w
Immigration, Marriage 132–4w
Public expenditure 72–3w
Transport, Finance 494

Lincolnshire
Local government finance 27w

Linton, Martin
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Crime (20.11.02) 674, 735–7
Sexual offences (19.11.02) 514

Liquefied petroleum gas
105–6w

Liverpool
Asylum 54w
Walton Group 25–6w

Livestock
Insurance 162–3w
Transport 40w, 766–7, 770–1, 779–80
Waste disposal 290–1w

Lloyd, Mr Tony
Questions
Railway stations, Manchester 74w

Llwyd, Mr Elfyn
Debates etc.
Sexual offences (19.11.02) 513
Questions
Civil defence, Wales 202w
Sheep dipping 778

Local Authority (Capital Finance) Regulations 1997
Written Statements
4ws

Local broadcasting
Radio 13w

Local government
Elections 33w
Standards 86w

Local Government Act 1988
Questions
Homosexuality 627

Local government finance
119w, 121–2w
Buckinghamshire 87–8w, 126w
Derbyshire (14.11.02) 252–60
Eddisbury 57–8w, 71w
Lincolnshire 27w
Rural areas 25–7w

Local heritage initiative
163w

London
see Greater London

London Underground
Amey Vectra 274w
Crime 495–6
Public private partnerships 274w

Lord Chancellor's Dept
Correspondence 207w
Hacking 207w
Pensions 93w
Tolls 94–5w

Lotto
10w
Sports 171w

Loughton, Tim
Questions
Domestic wastes, Recycling 284w

Love, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Economic policy (18.11.02) 444–5, 449
Queen's speech, Regional government (19.11.02) 577, 587

Low incomes
Housing 225w

Luff, Mr Peter
Debates etc.
Fire services (21.11.02) 894

Luke, Mr Iain
Questions
Aviation 491
Business questions 794–5

Lyons, Mr John
Questions
Junior doctors, Manpower 204w
Junior doctors, Working hours 238–9w

M10
78w

McCabe, Mr Stephen
Debates etc.
Fire services (14.11.02) 159–60

***McCartney, Rt Hon Ian**, Minister for Pensions, Department for Work and Pensions*
Questions
Annuities 279w
State earnings related pension scheme 280–1w

McDonagh, Ms Siobhain
Questions
Entertainments, Licensing 345–6
Environmental Protection Act 1990 771–2

McDonnell, John
Debates etc.
Fire services (21.11.02) 892

MacDougall, Mr John
Questions
Age, Discrimination 104–5w
Older workers, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 170w
Older workers, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 42w
Older workers, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 45w
Older workers, Ministry of Defence 222w

McFall, Mr John
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Economic policy (18.11.02) 408–11, 419

McGrady, Mr Eddie
Questions
Northern Ireland government 640–1

McIntosh, Miss Anne
Questions
Airports, Security 259w
Aviation 489
Churches, VAT 358–9
Film 355
Merchant shipping 265w
Official engagements, Prime Minister 138w

McIsaac, Shona
Debates etc.
Fire services (14.11.02) 163
Questions
Fisheries, Compensation 19–20w

MacKay, Rt Hon Andrew
Questions
Physical education 357

McKechin, Ann
Questions
Business questions 790–1

Mackinlay, Andrew
Debates etc.
Business questions intervention (14.11.02) 130
Queen's speech (13.11.02) 61–9, 72, 80, 91–2
Questions
Aviation 490
Business questions 133–4

McLoughlin, Mr Patrick
Debates etc.
Fire services (21.11.02) 893
Queen's speech, Crime (20.11.02) 742
Queen's speech, Economic policy (18.11.02) 389
Queen's speech, Regional government (19.11.02) 537, 553
Speeches, Points of order (18.11.02) 408
Questions
Business questions 137–8
Grants, Treasury 188w
Lead, Pollution control 766

McNamara, Mr Kevin
Questions
Armed forces, Death 113–5w, 118w
Armed forces, Deployment 14w
Armed forces, Disciplinary proceedings 115w
Armed forces, Fire services 211w, 217w
Armed forces, Intimidation 14w
Armed forces, Perjury 35w
Baton rounds 210–1w
Croft, Alison 36–7w
Riot control weapons, Training 219w
Security Forces Collusion with Loyalist Terrorists Inquiry 209w

***McNulty, Mr Tony**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister*
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Regional government (19.11.02) 528
Written Statements
Council housing 4ws
Housing revenue accounts 8–9ws
Planning, North East region 8ws
Questions
Aerials 633–4
Compulsory purchase 125w, 225–6w
Council housing 625–7
Council housing, Rents 226w
Hare Krishna, Religious buildings 226w

***McNulty, Mr Tony**—continued*
Housing, Construction 119w
Housing, Empty property 120w
Housing, Low incomes 225w
Housing, Northern region 118–9w
Housing, Private sector 119–20w
Housing, Rural areas 119w
Land 124w
Planning, Reform 631–2
Regional planning and development, South East region 227w
Rented housing, Insulation 226–7w
Walton Group, Liverpool 25–6w

***MacShane, Mr Denis**, Minister for Europe, Foreign and Commonwealth Office*
Questions
Arrest warrants, EC action 128w
Convention on the Future of Europe 127w
Cyprus 7–8w
Hungary, Law 128w

Mactaggart, Fiona
Debates etc.
Sexual offences (19.11.02) 517
Questions
Electoral systems, Public participation 359–60
Government departments, Standards 43w

McWalter, Mr Tony
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Education (15.11.02) 271–2, 277, 288, 291, 301–5
Questions
M10 78w
Public appointments, Prime Minister 644

McWilliam, Mr John
Debates etc.
Committee of Selection (21.11.02) 868–73, 881

Magistrates' courts
Sutton Coldfield (21.11.02) 901–8
York 208w

Mahmood, Mr Khalid
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Further education (21.11.02) 13wh, 38–41wh

Malawi
Overseas aid 250w

Males
Fertility 238w

Malins, Mr Humfrey
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Crime (20.11.02) 720

Mallaber, Judy
Debates etc.
Local government finance, Derbyshire (14.11.02) 252–60
Questions
Bus services 496–7
Domestic violence 118w

Manchester
Railway stations 74w

Mandelson, Rt Hon Peter
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Health services (14.11.02) 176

Mann, John
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Crime (20.11.02) 651–2, 719–21
Questions
Council housing 626–7

Manual workers
Immigration 95–6w

Maples, Mr John
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Crime (20.11.02) 661, 681–4

Maritime and Coastguard Agency
265w

Marketing
Tourism 11–2w

Marriage
Immigration 132–4w

Marris, Rob
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Economic policy (18.11.02) 404, 462
Queen's speech, Health services (14.11.02) 178
Questions
Business questions 134–5
Museums and galleries 12w

Marsden, Mr Paul
Questions
Heroin 247–8w
Malawi, Overseas aid 250w
Mental Health Bill (Draft) 239w
Railways, Accidents 22w
Suicide 278w

Martlew, Mr Eric
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Regional government (19.11.02) 563–5, 607

Mass media
13w
Ownership 170–1w

Maundy money
Costs 189w

Mawhinney, Rt Hon Sir Brian
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Crime (20.11.02) 653, 678–80

May, Mrs Theresa
Questions
Children, Theatre 98–100w
Public footpaths, Bisham 157–8w
Schools, Windsor 146w
Schools, Wokingham 140–1w

***Meacher, Rt Hon Michael**, Minister of State for the Environment, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs*
Written Statements
Refrigerators 2ws
Questions
Abandoned vehicles 288w
Carbon dioxide, Pollution control 123w
Climate change 158–9w
Combined heat and power 281w
Disposable nappies 281w
Domestic wastes, Recycling 284w
Environment Agency, Official cars 156w
Environment protection, Business 282w
Environment protection, Departmental coordination 156–7w
Environment Protection (Duty of Care) Regulations 1991 284–5w
Environmental Protection Act 1990 771–3
Fly tipping 283–4w
Fuels, Excise duties 780–1
Genetically modified organisms 292w
Green Ministers Committee 158w
Lead, Pollution control 765–6
Metals, Pollution control 777–8
Non-food crops 784

Meacher, Rt Hon Michael*—*continued
Organic farming 164w
Recycling, Greater London 283w
Soil 167w
Tipping of waste 286w
Waste disposal, Electronic equipment 782

Meat
Smuggling 767–70
Waste disposal 40w

Medals
Reserve forces 37w

Members
Correspondence 53–4w, 251–2w, 258w
Cycling 173w

Men
see Males

Mental Health Act 1983
Questions
34w

Mental Health Bill (Draft)
Questions
34w, 239w, 642

Mental health services
34w
Children 103–4w

Mercer, Patrick
Debates etc.
Fire services (14.11.02) 154
Queen's speech, Crime (20.11.02) 701–3
Questions
Armed forces, Protective clothing 115w
Business questions 796
Fiji, Foreign workers 216–7w
Navy, Telecommunications 35w
Nottinghamshire Constabulary, Manpower 54w
Queen Elizabeth II, Anniversaries 37w
Territorial Army, Incentives 222w

Merchant shipping
265w

Metals
Pollution control 777–8

Meters
Water 154w

***Michael, Rt Hon Alun**, Minister of State, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs*
Questions
Air pollution 5–6w, 39w
Air pollution, Central heating 41–2w
Air pollution, Urban areas 284w
BSE, Disease control 290w
Consultants, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 155w
Correspondence, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 41w
Countryside, Access 6w
Countryside Agency, Finance 41w
Countryside stewardship scheme 6w
EC grants and loans, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 158w
Hacking, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 42w
Hunting, Research 159–62w
Local heritage initiative 163w
Monetary compensatory amounts 281–2w
Official cars, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 163–4w
Older workers, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 42w
Public footpaths, Bisham 157–8w
Rural areas 42–3w
Rural areas, Housing 165–6w
Rural areas, Regeneration 166w

Michael, Rt Hon Alun*—*continued
Rural areas, Roads 181w
Rural Payments Agency, Finance 296w
Sheep dipping 778–9
Slaughter premium scheme 6–7w
Tolls, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 40–1w

Mid Essex Hospital Services NHS Trust
Waiting lists 239w

Midlands
Aviation 488–9

***Milburn, Rt Hon Alan**, Secretary of State for Health*
Debates etc.
Community Care (Delayed Discharges Etc) Bill, 1R (14.11.02) 164
Queen's speech, Health services (14.11.02) 166–80
Written Statements
Health 38ws
Questions
NHS Bank 240w

***Miliband, Mr David**, Minister of State for Schools, Dept for Education and Skills*
Questions
Class sizes 28–30w
Education, Assessments 31w
Education, Buckinghamshire 56–7w
Education, Finance 30–1w
Local government finance, Eddisbury 57–8w
Non-teaching staff 31–2w
Non-teaching staff, Buckinghamshire 61w
Non-teaching staff, Ilford 55w
Personal and social education, Training 147w
Qualifications and Curriculum Authority 58–9w
Schools, Buckinghamshire 59–60w
Schools, Finance 31w
Schools, Windsor 146w
Schools, Wokingham 140–1w
Secondary education 61w
Secondary education, Buckinghamshire 60w
Teachers, Buckinghamshire 60w, 67w
Teachers, Pay 63–7w
Teachers, Training 32–3w
Technology Colleges Trust, Finance 32w
Truancy, Essex 148w

Military attaches
214w

Military bases
Greater London 215w, 219–20w

Military decorations
National service 36w
World War II 35w

Millennium Stadium
231w

Minimum wage
274–5w
Social security benefits 186w

Mining
Industrial diseases 109w, 112w

Ministerial policy advisors
EC law 202–3w

Ministerial statements
18w
Fire services (14.11.02) 140–63, (21.11.02) 885–900
Rulings and statements (20.11.02) 646
Sexual offences (19.11.02) 505–20
Social security benefits (18.11.02) 365–80

Ministers
Charter flights 18w
Codes of practice 504
Official cars 202w
Official gifts 17w

Ministers of religion
Conditions of employment 361–2
Pay 24w
Pensions 24w
Royal Naval Reserve 38w

Ministry of Defence
Computers 117w
Hacking 116–7w
Information services 211–2w
Older workers 222w

"Ministry of Defence Consolidated Departmental Resource Accounts, 2001/02"
46ws

"Ministry of Defence Performance Report, 2001/02"
46ws

Mitchell, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
Magistrates' courts, Sutton Coldfield (21.11.02) 901–4, 907
Queen's speech, Regional government (19.11.02) 591–4
Social security benefits (18.11.02) 374–5
Questions
Business questions 791

Mitchell, Mr Austin
Debates etc.
Fisheries (21.11.02) 820, 834, 843–6

Mladic, Ratko
45–6w

MMR vaccine
102w

Mobile phone masts
see Aerials

Moffatt, Laura
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Economic policy (18.11.02) 403, 452–4

Monetary compensatory amounts
281–2w

Monuments
National service 36w

***Moonie, Dr Lewis**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary, Ministry of Defence*
Written Statements
Defence Medical Services 14–6ws
War pensions 9–10ws
Questions
Armed forces, Death 113–5w, 118w
Armed forces, Deployment 14w
Armed forces, Disciplinary proceedings 115w
Armed forces, Health 219w
Armed forces, Intimidation 14w
Armed forces, Manpower 222–3w
Armed forces, Perjury 35w
Armed forces, Protective clothing 115w
Armed forces, Recruitment 38w
Armed forces, Retirement 117w
Armed forces, Training 115–6w
Civil servants, Business interests 223w
Computers, Ministry of Defence 117w
Croft, Alison 36–7w
D-Day landings, Anniversaries 35w
Exservicemen, Radiation exposure 36w, 220w
Gurkhas 218–9w
Hacking, Ministry of Defence 116–7w

***Moonie, Dr Lewis**—continued*
Military bases, Greater London 215w, 219–20w
National service, Military decorations 36w
National service, Monuments 36w
Navy, Telecommunications 35w
Older workers, Ministry of Defence 222w
Queen Elizabeth II, Anniversaries 37w
Royal Irish Regiment, Manpower 37–8w
Royal Naval Hospital Haslar 222w
Royal Naval Reserve, Ministers of religion 38w
Territorial Army, Incentives 38–9w, 222w
Thailand, Peace keeping operations 216w
World War II, Military decorations 35w

Moore, Mr Michael
Questions
VAT 187w

Moran, Margaret
Debates etc.
Sexual offences (19.11.02) 518
Questions
Electronic government 501–2

Moray
Floods 641

Morgan, Julie
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Crime (20.11.02) 712–4
Sexual offences (19.11.02) 512
Questions
Equality 632

***Morley, Mr Elliot**, Parliamentary Secretary, Dept of Environment Food and Rural Affairs*
Debates etc.
Fisheries (21.11.02) 801–17, 823, 835, 838–9, 862–4
Written Statements
Pet travel scheme 42ws
Questions
Agriculture, Pollution 167w
Animal products, Waste disposal 39w
Bassenthwaite Lake, Pollution 287w
Bovine tuberculosis 297w, 782–4
Bovine tuberculosis, Disease control 154w, 282–3w
BSE, Disease control 155w
Compost 155w
Disease control, EC grants and loans 40w
EC Fisheries Council 282w
Eggs 781–2
Farmers, Age 157w
Farms, Diversification 155w
Fisheries 775–7
Fisheries, Scotland 287w
Flood control 291w
Flood control, Finance 156w
Floods, Housing 156w
Floods, Statistics 288–9w
Foot and mouth disease, Disease control 287w
Grain, Competition 290w
Horticulture Research International 42w
Ivory 289–90w
Landlords, Water charges 127w
Livestock, Insurance 162–3w
Livestock, Transport 40w, 766–7, 770–1, 779–80
Livestock, Waste disposal 290–1w
Meat, Waste disposal 40w
Offal, Imports 292–4w
Pesticides 285–6w
Pet travel scheme 165w
Pigs, Subsidies 281w
Poultry, Imports 295–6w
Quarantine 165w
Sewage, Recycling 166–7w

***Morley, Mr Elliot**—continued*
Veterinary services 298w
Veterinary services, Disciplinary proceedings 167w
Water, Meters 154w
Water companies 154w
Water supply 167–8w

Mortgage Direct
72w

Mortgages
Islam 70–1w
VAT 189w

Mountford, Kali
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Crime (20.11.02) 664
Questions
Crime, Victims 641–2

Mullin, Mr Chris
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Crime (20.11.02) 670–1, 676–8

Munn, Meg
Debates etc.
Queen's speech (13.11.02) 18

Murrison, Dr Andrew
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Crime (20.11.02) 698
Queen's speech, Health services (14.11.02) 198–9, 224, 229, 232, 237–40
Questions
Armed forces, Retirement 117w
Parish councils 88–90w
Royal Naval Reserve, Ministers of religion 38w
Royal United Hospital Bath 102–3w
Speed limits, Road signs and markings 271w

Museum of the Moving Image
231–2w

Museums and galleries
12w
Bletchley Park 230w

Musical instruments
VAT 23w

National Air Traffic Services
Industrial disputes 274w

National Audit Office
72w

National Health Service (Wales) Bill (Draft)
Debates etc.
1R (14.11.02) 163

National Institute for Mental Health
239w

National insurance contributions
Non-payment 189–90w

National service
Military decorations 36w
Monuments 36w

National Statistics
see Office for National Statistics

Natural gas
Prices 1ws

Natural resources
Democratic Republic of Congo 8–9w

Navy
Telecommunications 35w

Naysmith, Dr Douglas
Questions
Countryside, Access 6w

***Naysmith, Dr Douglas**—continued*
Disposable nappies 281w
Hepatitis 101–2w
Housing benefit, Supported housing 154w

Neighbourhood wardens
Finance 27–8w

Nepal
46w

Network Rail
275w

New Zealand
Exservicemen 36w

Newcastle upon Tyne
European City of Culture 346

NHS
Contracts 204–5w
Finance 205w
Health services 635–6
Sick leave 245w
Training 46ws

NHS Bank
240w

Nine minutes rule
Rulings and statements (19.11.02) 520

Nitrate Vulnerable Zones (Additional Designations) (England) (No 2) Regulations 2002
Debates etc.
(18.11.02) 474

Noise
Aircraft 175–7w

Non-food crops
784

Non-governmental organisations
Overseas aid 195w

Non-teaching staff
31–2w
Buckinghamshire 61w
Ilford 55w

Norfolk
Hospital beds 644

Norman, Mr Archie
Questions
Transport, Finance 495

North Cheshire Hospitals NHS Trust
Public relations 240–1w

North East region
Planning 8ws

North Sea oil
(13.11.02) 118–26

North West region
Railways 77w
Regional assemblies 121w, 628

Northern Ireland
Assets Recovery Agency 4w
Electoral register 253w
Fire services 217w
Horticulture 48w
Illegal immigrants 128–9w
Petrol 253–4w
Police 640
Police stations 136w
Secondary education 203w

Northern Ireland government
640–1

Northern Ireland Office
Tolls 253w

Northern Ireland Prison Service
Housing 254w

Northern region
Housing 118–9w

Nottinghamshire Constabulary
Manpower 54w

Nuclear power
Climate change levy 186w

Nurses
Foreign workers 205–6w

***O'Brien, Mr Mike**, *Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office*
Debates etc.
Woodbridge, Jeff (18.11.02) 480–4
Questions
Afghanistan 44w
Afghanistan, Detainees 127w
Israel, Arms trade 233w
Nepal 46w
Older workers, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 45w
USA, Diplomatic service 234w

O'Brien, Mr Stephen
Questions
Banks, Switzerland 186w
Credit cards, Fraud 69w
European Central Bank 69w
Investment trusts 73w, 188w
Local government finance 121w
Local government finance, Eddisbury 57–8w, 71w
Office for National Statistics 73w
Stability Pact 73w
Tax credit, Pensions 276w

O'Brien, Mr William
Questions
Bus services 497–8

Offal
Imports 292–4w

Office for National Statistics
72–3w, 275–6w

Office of the Deputy Prime Minister
Tolls 81w, 169w

Office of the Secretary of State for Wales
Tolls 96w

Official cars
Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 163–4w
Dept for Transport 266w
Environment Agency 156w
Ministers 202w
Taxation 189w

Official engagements
Prime Minister 138w

Official gifts
Ministers 17w
Royal family 254w

Official residences
Repairs and maintenance 138w

Oil
Central heating 41–2w

Older workers
Dept for Culture Media and Sport 170w
Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 42w
Foreign and Commonwealth Office 45w
Ministry of Defence 222w

Olympic Games
Greater London 14w

O'Neill, Mr Martin
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Economic policy (18.11.02) 413, 421–4

Operation Sandcastle
220–1w

Opik, Lembit
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Crime (20.11.02) 669
Questions
Livestock, Transport 40w

Oral questions
Rulings and statements (18.11.02) 345

Organic farming
164w

Osborne, Mr George
Debates etc.
Fire services (14.11.02) 161
Queen's speech, Regional government (19.11.02) 535
Questions
Livestock, Transport 770–1
Regional assemblies, North West region 121w

Osborne, Sandra
Questions
NHS, Contracts 204–5w

Ottaway, Richard
Questions
Roads, Tolls 492–3

"Our Countryside the Future: A Fair Deal for Rural England White Paper"
42–3w

"Our Towns and Cities White Paper"
227–8w

Overseas aid
200w
Afghanistan 16–7w
Central Africa 16w
Children 198w
EC enlargement 1w
Education 49w
Ethiopia 197w
Malawi 250w
Non-governmental organisations 195w
Southern Africa 52–4w
Sudan 201–2w
Zimbabwe 53w

Paddington Station
267w

Paice, Mr James
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Crime (20.11.02) 729, 738–41

Paisley, Rev Ian
Debates etc.
Queen's speech (13.11.02) 42–6

Palmer, Dr Nick
Questions
Lotto 10w

Parish councils
88–90w

Parking offences
Fines 21w, 90w

Parliamentary scrutiny
Legislative drafting 44w

Patients
Foreigners 241w
Prospectuses 241–2w

Peace keeping operations
Afghanistan 209w
Thailand 216w

Peace negotiations
Democratic Republic of Congo 16w

***Pearson, Mr Ian**, *Lord Commissioner of Her Majesty's Treasury & Parliamentary Under-Sec of State, Northern Ireland Office*
Questions
Horticulture, Northern Ireland 48w
Petrol, Northern Ireland 253–4w

Peers
17w

Penrose Inquiry
see Equitable Life Independent Inquiry

Pensions
Civil servants 23–4w
Lord Chancellor's Dept 93w
Ministers of religion 24w
Petitions (19.11.02) 618
Post offices 279–80w
Queen's speech (14.11.02) 166–250
Tax credit 276w

Perham, Linda
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Economic policy (18.11.02) 433–6
Questions
Age, Discrimination 632–3
Asylum, Children 129w
Correspondence, Lord Chancellor's Dept 207w
Crossrail line, Finance 74w
Homelessness 26w
Housing, Low incomes 225w
Human trafficking 130w
Non-teaching staff, Ilford 55w
Public libraries, Chartermark scheme 10w
Schools, Crimes of violence 59w
Taxis, Greater London 258–9w

Perjury
Armed forces 35w

Personal and social education
Training 147w

Peru
Prisoners 46–7w

Pesticides
285–6w

Pet travel scheme
42ws, 165w

Pet Travel Scheme (Pilot Arrangements) (England) (Amendment) (No 2) Order 2002
Written Statements
42ws

Petitions
Bus services (19.11.02) 617–8
Complementary medicine (19.11.02) 616, (20.11.02) 755
Fisheries (14.11.02) 251
Furs (19.11.02) 616–7
Pensions (19.11.02) 618
Swaminarayan Hindu Mission 140w

Petrol
Northern Ireland 253–4w

Physical education
11w, 356–7

Physiotherapy
Registration 242w

Picking, Anne
Debates etc.
Committee of Selection (21.11.02) 873–4, 876

Pickles, Mr Eric
Questions
Council housing 626

Pickthall, Mr Colin
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Education (15.11.02) 280, 287–92
Questions
Licensing laws 10–1w

Pigs
Subsidies 281w

Pike, Mr Peter L
Debates etc.
Fire services (21.11.02) 896
Queen's speech, Regional government (19.11.02) 539, 583–5
Questions
Church Commissioners, Assets 363–4
Fuels, Excise duties 780–1
Regional assemblies 630

Planning
North East region 8ws
Reform 631–2

Planning permission
Playing fields 232w

Plaskitt, Mr James
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Economic policy (18.11.02) 401
Social security benefits (18.11.02) 375

Playing fields
Planning permission 232w

Pneumoconiosis
Compensation 109–10w

Police
37–8ws
Bosnia 38–9ws
Northern Ireland 640

Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984
Written Statements
8–9ws

Police Reform Act 2002
Written Statements
37–8ws

Police stations
Northern Ireland 136w

Political refugees
see Asylum

Politics and government
Central Africa 234w

Pollard, Mr Kerry
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Health services (14.11.02) 226–8
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Further education (21.11.02) 28wh, 30–1wh, 34wh, 42wh

Pollution
Agriculture 267w
Bassenthwaite Lake 287w

Pollution control
Carbon dioxide 123w
Lead 765–6
Metals 777–8

Pond, Mr Chris
Debates etc.
Queen's speech (13.11.02) 25
Queen's speech, Crime (20.11.02) 653, 721–3
Sexual offences (19.11.02) 513
Social security benefits (18.11.02) 379
Questions
Airports, Kent 638
Civil servants, Ethnic groups 502–3
Local broadcasting, Radio 13w

Post offices
Pensions 279–80w
Social security benefits 279–80w
Urban areas 126w

Poultry
Imports 295–6w

Poultry meat
Food composition 242–3w

Pound, Mr Stephen
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Health services (14.11.02) 179, 217, 228, 230–3

Power failures
Electricity 108w, 110–2w

Pre-Budget report 2002
1w

Prentice, Mr Gordon
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Regional government (19.11.02) 536, 542
Questions
Business questions 793
Channel tunnel railway line 262w

Prescott, Rt Hon John, Deputy Prime Minister and Secretary of State for Local Government and the Regions
Debates etc.
Fire services, Ministerial statements (14.11.02) 140–63, (21.11.02) 885–900
Queen's speech, Regional government (19.11.02) 526, 530–9, 543
Regional Assemblies (Preparations) Bill, 1R (14.11.02) 164
Written Statements
Councillors 11ws
Questions
British Irish Council 121w
Climate change 120w
Regional assemblies 628–31
Regional assemblies, North West region 628

Prescriptions
243–4w
Elderly 203w
Fees and charges 206w

Press releases
Queen's speech 19w

Pressure groups
Public transport 78w

Price, Adam
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Education (15.11.02) 304
Questions
Fire services, Industrial disputes 634–5
Pneumoconiosis, Compensation 109–10w

Primarolo, Rt Hon Dawn, Paymaster General
Questions
Banks, Switzerland 186w
Budget April 2002, Leaflets 71w
Capital allowances 187w
Child tax credit, Kettering 68–9w

Primarolo, Rt Hon Dawn—continued
Income tax 70w
Income tax, Research 189w
National insurance contributions, Non-payment 189–90w
Taxation, Official cars 189w
Taxpayers 188w
Working families tax credit 191w

Prime Minister
Correspondence 17w
Lancashire 140w
Official engagements 138w
Public appointments 644
Written questions 18–9w

Prisk, Mr Mark
Questions
Airports, South East region 78w
Aviation 489–90
Business links, Advertising 256w

Prisoners
Peru 46–7w

Prisoners' release
Housing 28w

Private finance initiative
191w, 276–8w

Private sector
Housing 119–20w

Procedure Select Committee
(19.11.02) 616

Prospectuses
Patients 241–2w

Protective clothing
Armed forces 115w

Public appointments
Females 43–4w
Prime Minister 644
Regional development agencies 43–4ws
World Bank 191–2w

Public expenditure
72–3w, 191w
Dept for International Development 251w

Public finance
72w, 272w

Public footpaths
Bisham 157–8w

Public libraries
Chartermark scheme 10w

Public participation
Electoral systems 359–61

Public private partnerships
277–8w
London Underground 274w

Public relations
North Cheshire Hospitals NHS Trust 240–1w

Public Sector Classification Committee
190–1w

Public transport
Pressure groups 78w
Travel information 77w

Pugh, Dr John
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Further education (21.11.02) 7wh, 22–6wh
Questions
Floods, Statistics 288–9w
West coast railway line 76w

Purchase, Mr Ken
Debates etc.
Queen's speech (13.11.02) 56, 64, 84–8

Purnell, James
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Health services (14.11.02) 183, 207–10, 243
Questions
Film 354–5

Qualifications and Curriculum Authority
58–9w

Quarantine
165w

Queen Elizabeth II
Anniversaries 37w

Queen's speech
(13.11.02) 3–5, 13–117
Addresses to the Crown (13.11.02) 6–13
Crime (20.11.02) 647–755
Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs (19.11.02) 521–616
Economic policy (18.11.02) 385–474
Education (15.11.02) 261–338
Health services (14.11.02) 166–250
Pensions (14.11.02) 166–250
Press releases 19w
Regional government (19.11.02) 521–616
Transport (19.11.02) 521–616

Quin, Rt Hon Joyce
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Regional government (19.11.02) 527, 551–3
Questions
European City of Culture, Newcastle upon Tyne 346

Quinn, Lawrie
Debates etc.
Fisheries (21.11.02) 822, 824, 831, 833, 836–9
Queen's speech, Regional government (19.11.02) 537, 543, 549
Questions
Fisheries 776
Planning, Reform 631
Tourism, Coastal areas 347–8

Radiation exposure
Exservicemen 36w, 220w

Radio
3–4ws
Local broadcasting 13w

Radioactive materials
Transport 181–2w, 255–6w

Railtrack
Finance 77w

Railway stations
183w
Manchester 74w
Wokingham 267w

Railways
Accidents 22w, 173–4w, (15.11.02) 338–44, 485–7
Electrification 183w
Fares 184w
Finance 77w
Lewes 75w
North West region 77w
Safety 263w

Rain forests
Debts 257w

***Rammell, Mr Bill**, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office*
Written Statements
Police, Bosnia 38–9ws
Questions
Avient Air 44–5w

***Rammell, Mr Bill**—continued*
Bredenkamp, John 9–10w
Central Africa, Politics and government 234w
China, Guided weapons 47w
Democratic Republic of Congo, Natural resources 8–9w
Ethiopia, Entry clearances 47w
Hacking, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 9w
Kenya, Elections 233–4w
Mladic, Ratko 45–6w
Peru, Prisoners 46–7w
Taiwan, EC external trade 47w
Tolls, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 45w
Training, Expenditure 127w
Zimbabwe, Arms trade 9w
Zimbabwe, Sanctions 9w

Randall, Mr John
Debates etc.
Fire services (21.11.02) 896
Questions
Sports, Young people 11w

Rape
Sentencing 252w

***Raynsford, Rt Hon Nick**, Minister for Local Government, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister*
Written Statements
Council tax 12–3ws
Empty property 12ws
Questions
Constituencies 121–2w
Council tax 124w
Fire services 25w
Fire services, Armed forces 113w
Fire services, Industrial disputes 122–3w
Local government, Standards 86w
Local Government Act 1988, Homosexuality 627
Local government finance 119w, 121w
Local government finance, Buckinghamshire 87–8w, 126w
Local government finance, Lincolnshire 27w
Local government finance, Rural areas 25–7w
Regional assemblies 633
Regional assemblies, North West region 121w
Regional planning and development, Eastern region 81w
Revenue support grant, Isle of Wight 86–7w
Urban areas, Finance 227–8w

Recruitment
Armed forces 38w

Recycling
Batteries 106–7w
Domestic wastes 284w
Greater London 283w
Sewage 166–7w

Redwood, Rt Hon John
Debates etc.
Queen's speech (13.11.02) 34, 52–61
Questions
Air pollution, Central heating 41–2w
Bus services 261w
Buses 20w
Business questions 791–2
Commuters, Greater London 264–5w
Environment Agency, Official cars 156w
Exhaust emissions 263–4w
Flood control, Finance 156w
Floods, Housing 156w
NHS, Finance 205w

***Redwood, Rt Hon John**—continued*
Official cars, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 163–4w
Official cars, Dept for Transport 266w
Paddington Station 267w
Railway stations, Wokingham 267w
Railways, Safety 263w
Road traffic, Greater London 180w
Roads, Greater London 21w, 266w
Roads, Urban areas 21–2w
Secondary education 61w
Traffic lights 272w
Transport, Infrastructure 267w
Warships 223w

Reed, Mr Andy
Questions
Chess 358

Refrigerators
2ws

Refugees
see Asylum

Reg(EC)2792/99
(21.11.02) 801–67

Reg(EC)1592/2002
177w

Regeneration
Rural areas 166w

Regional assemblies
628–31, 633
North West region 121w, 628

Regional Assemblies (Preparations) Bill 2002/03
Debates etc.
1R (14.11.02) 164

Regional development agencies
105w
Public appointments 43–4ws

"Regional Development Agencies Reported Outputs First Quarter 2002/03"
39–41ws

Regional government
Queen's speech (19.11.02) 521–616

Regional planning and development
Business 149w
Eastern region 81w
South East region 227w

Regional selective assistance
South West region 111w

Registration of births deaths and marriages
Digital technology 68w

Regulatory impact assessments
37ws

Reid, Mr Alan
Debates etc.
Fisheries (21.11.02) 859–60

Religious buildings
Hare Krishna 226w

Rendel, Mr David
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Education (15.11.02) 316, 320, 332

Rendering industry
295w

Renewable energy
153w, (20.11.02) 756–64

Rented housing
Insulation 226–7w

Rents
Council housing 226w

Reserve forces
Medals 37w

Resignations
Learning and Skills Council for England 142–5w

"Response to Consultation on Gas Issues"
1ws

Retirement
Armed forces 117w

Revenue support grant
Isle of Wight 86–7w

Riot control weapons
Training 219w

Risk assessment
Public sector 37ws

Road signs and markings
Speed limits 271w

Road traffic
183–4w
Greater London 180w

Road traffic control
78w

Road traffic offences
Cycling 246–8w

"Road Traffic Penalties Consultation Paper"
248w

Roads
Accidents 173–4w
Construction 181w, 268–70w
Greater London 21w, 266w
Rural areas 181w
Tolls 492–3
Urban areas 21–2w

Robathan, Mr Andrew
Questions
Airports, Rugby Warwickshire 76w
Business questions 798

Robertson, Angus
Debates etc.
Fisheries (21.11.02) 849–50
Queen's speech, Regional government (19.11.02) 565, 580, 586, 597–8
Questions
Floods, Moray 641

Robertson, Hugh
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Education (15.11.02) 328–9
Questions
Physical education 11w

Robertson, John
Debates etc.
Fire services (14.11.02) 161
Questions
Climate change 120w

Robertson, Mr Laurence
Questions
Gurkhas 218–9w
Israel, Arms trade 233w

Robinson, Mrs Iris
Questions
Gibraltar, Sovereignty 17w
Northern Ireland Prison Service, Housing 254w

***Roche, Mrs Barbara**, Minister of State and Deputy Minister for Women, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister*
Questions
Age, Discrimination 632–3

***Roche, Mrs Barbara**—continued*
Bed and breakfast accommodation, Expenditure 80w
Domestic violence 118w
Equality 632
Homelessness 26w, 125–6w
Neighbourhood wardens, Finance 27–8w
Post offices, Urban areas 126w
Prisoners' release, Housing 28w
Social Exclusion Unit 120w

Rooney, Mr Terry
Debates etc.
Social security benefits (18.11.02) 374

Rosindell, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Crime (20.11.02) 708–10
Questions
Train operating companies, Standards 76w

Roy, Mr Frank
Questions
Airguns 246w
China, Guided weapons 47w
Prescriptions, Fees and charges 206w

Royal family
Official gifts 254w

Royal Irish Regiment
Manpower 37–8w

Royal Naval Hospital Haslar
222w, 244–5w

Royal Naval Reserve
Ministers of religion 38w

Royal prerogative
19w

Royal United Hospital Bath
102–3w

Ruane, Chris
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Addresses to the Crown (13.11.02) 8
Questions
Pet travel scheme 165w
Quarantine 165w

Ruddock, Joan
Questions
Environment Protection (Duty of Care) Regulations 1991 284–5w
Environmental Protection Act 1990 772–3
European Food Safety Authority 101w

Rugby Warwickshire
Airports 76w

Rural areas
42–3w, 94w
Housing 119w, 165–6w
Local government finance 25–7w
Regeneration 166w
Roads 181w

Rural Payments Agency
Finance 296w

Russell, Bob
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Addresses to the Crown (13.11.02) 6
Questions
Regional planning and development, Eastern region 81w
Regional planning and development, South East region 227w
Summertime 123w
VAT, Musical instruments 23w

Rwanda
51w

St Andrew's Day
45–6ws

Salmond, Mr Alex
Debates etc.
Cats, Petitions (19.11.02) 616–7
Committee of Selection (21.11.02) 868, 870, 876, 880, 883
Fisheries (21.11.02) 802, 804, 810, 812–3, 825, 833, 841, 847–51
Fisheries, Petitions (14.11.02) 251
Furs, Petitions (19.11.02) 616–7
North Sea oil (13.11.02) 119, 123
Queen's speech (13.11.02) 27, 35–6
Queen's speech, Regional government (19.11.02) 522, 528, 530, 560–3, 608
Questions
Fisheries 777

Salter, Mr Martin
Questions
Business questions 795–6

Sanctions
Zimbabwe 9w

Sanders, Mr Adrian
Questions
Diabetes 101w
Homelessness 125–6w
Regional development agencies 105w
Tourism, Coastal areas 348–9

Sarwar, Mr Mohammad
Questions
Nepal 46w
Southern Africa, Overseas aid 52–4w

Savidge, Mr Malcolm
Debates etc.
Fisheries (21.11.02) 820, 826, 831

Sawford, Phil
Questions
A6, Bypasses 75w
Annuities 22–3w
Child tax credit, Kettering 68–9w
Energy supply, Sustainable development 111–2w
Sports, Young people 11w

Sayeed, Mr Jonathan
Questions
Air pollution 5–6w, 39w
Animal products, Waste disposal 39w
Compost 155w
Environmental Protection Act 1990 773
Liquefied petroleum gas 105–6w
Meat, Waste disposal 40w

Schools
Buckinghamshire 59–60w
Crimes of violence 59w
Finance 31w
Sports 146–7w
Transport 54–5w, 270–1w
Windsor 146w
Wokingham 140–1w

Scotland
Aviation 488–9
BBC 10w
Fisheries 287w
Hydroelectric power 109w

Scotland Office
Tolls 94w

Secondary education
61w
Buckinghamshire 60w
Northern Ireland 203w

Security
Airports 259w
Aviation 177–8w

***Security**—continued*
Devonport Dockyard 215–6w
Expenditure 140w
Government departments 43w

Security Forces Collusion with Loyalist Terrorists Inquiry
209w

Selous, Andrew
Debates etc.
Complementary medicine, Petitions (20.11.02) 755
Fire services, Points of order (18.11.02) 383
Queen's speech, Economic policy (18.11.02) 394
Queen's speech, Regional government (19.11.02) 566–8

Sentencing
Rape 252w

"Sessional Returns, 2001/02"
(20.11.02) 625

Sewage
Recycling 166–7w

Sexual offences
Democratic Republic of Congo 196w
Ministerial statements (19.11.02) 505–20

Shaw, Mr Jonathan
Debates etc.
Queen's speech (13.11.02) 26

Sheep dipping
778–9

Sheerman, Mr Barry
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Further education (21.11.02) 4–6wh, 17–22wh
Questions
Business questions 131
Film 355

Shephard, Rt Hon Gillian
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Regional government (19.11.02) 553–7

Sheridan, Mr Jim
Debates etc.
Committee of Selection (21.11.02) 872, 875

Shipping
Taxation 80w

***Short, Rt Hon Clare**, Secretary of State for International Development*
Questions
Adam Smith Institute, Dept for International Development 2–4w
Afghanistan, International assistance 249w
Afghanistan, Overseas aid 16–7w
Africa, Food supply 1–2w
Africa, Health 194w
Angola 194–5w
Angola, Exservicemen 194w
Burma, International assistance 248–9w
CDC Capital Partners 199w
Central Africa, Overseas aid 16w
Democratic Republic of Congo, Sexual offences 196w
Developing countries, Coffee 193–4w
Developing countries, Drugs 250–1w
Developing countries, Education 14–6w, 50–1w
Developing countries, Health services 200w
Developing countries, Sub-Saharan Africa 193w

***Short, Rt Hon Clare**—continued*
Developing countries, Sustainable development 49–50w
Developing countries, Water supply 51–2w, 200–1w
Development aid 250w
EC aid 3w
Eritrea 196–7w
Eritrea, International assistance 196w
Ethiopia 197–8w
Ethiopia, Overseas aid 197w
European Bank for Reconstruction and Development 198w
Hacking, Dept for International Development 199w
Malawi, Overseas aid 250w
Overseas aid 200w
Overseas aid, Children 198w
Overseas aid, EC enlargement 1w
Overseas aid, Education 49w
Overseas aid, Non-governmental organisations 195w
Pay, Dept for International Development 250w
Public expenditure, Dept for International Development 251w
Rwanda 51w
Southern Africa, Overseas aid 52–4w
Sudan, Overseas aid 201–2w
Tolls, Dept for International Development 49w
Zimbabwe, Food aid 251w
Zimbabwe, HIV infection 198w
Zimbabwe, Overseas aid 53w

Sick leave
NHS 245w

Simmonds, Mr Mark
Debates etc.
Fisheries (21.11.02) 817, 825
Queen's speech, Crime (20.11.02) 715, 737
Questions
Fisheries 776

Simon, Mr Sion
Debates etc.
Magistrates' courts, Sutton Coldfield (21.11.02) 905–6

Simpson, Mr Alan
Questions
Fire services, Industrial disputes 639–40
Railtrack, Finance 77w

Simpson, Mr Keith
Questions
Armed forces, Fire services 221w
Business questions 792–3
Military bases, Greater London 215w, 219–20w

Skinner, Mr Dennis
Debates etc.
Fire services (21.11.02) 894–5

Slaughter premium scheme
6–7w

Small businesses
Equal opportunities 151–2w

***Smith, Rt Hon Andrew**, Secretary of State for Work and Pensions*
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Health services (14.11.02) 247–50
Social security benefits, Ministerial statements (18.11.02) 365–80
Written Statements
Social security benefits, Uprating 16–36ws

***Smith, Jacqui**, Minister of State, Dept of Health*
Questions
Adoption, Homosexuality 97–8w
Arthritis 235w
Care homes, Assessments 99–100w
Care homes, Fees and charges 241w
Children, Theatre 98–100w
Children in care, Advocacy 235w
Foster care 101w
Health services, Warrington 246w
Hospital beds 100–1w
Mental Health Bill (Draft) 239w
Mental health services 34w
Mental health services, Children 103–4w
National Institute for Mental Health 239w
North Cheshire Hospitals NHS Trust, Public relations 240–1w
Social services, Fees and charges 245w

Smith, Sir Robert
Debates etc.
Fisheries (21.11.02) 802, 807, 822–3, 860
North Sea oil (13.11.02) 119
Questions
Monetary compensatory amounts 281–2w

Smuggling
Meat 767–70

Smyth, Rev Martin
Debates etc.
Queen's speech (13.11.02) 25, 46, 96–9
Sexual offences (19.11.02) 516
Questions
Banks, Licensing 272w

Soames, Mr Nicholas
Debates etc.
Oral questions, Points of order (20.11.02) 646
Questions
Regional assemblies 628
Tourism, Coastal areas 349

Social Exclusion Unit
120w

Social security benefits
Expenditure 279w
Fraud 41–2ws
Islington 41–2ws
Minimum wage 186w
Ministerial statements (18.11.02) 365–80
Post offices 279–80w
Uprating 16–36ws

Social services
Fees and charges 245w

Soil
167w

Solar power
Job creation 258w

Soley, Mr Clive
Debates etc.
Fire services (14.11.02) 160
Queen's speech (13.11.02) 42, 57, 63, 106–11
Questions
Housing benefit 153–4w
Mass media 13w

South East region
Airports 78w
Regional planning and development 227w

South West region
Regional selective assistance 111w

Southern Africa
Overseas aid 52–4w

Southworth, Ms Helen
Questions
Bus services 500

Sovereignty
Gibraltar 17w

Speaker and deputies
Debates etc.
Amendments and new clauses (19.11.02) 521, (20.11.02) 647, (21.11.02) 801, 868
Conduct of proceedings (13.11.02) 6, 17–8, 20, 49, 60, 84, 92, (14.11.02) 145, 157–8, 199, (15.11.02) 267, 301, (18.11.02) 352, 359, 378, (19.11.02) 494, 497–8, 516, 534, 541, 548, 565, 573, 597, 605, 611, (20.11.02) 626, 629, 632, 638, 640, 645, 647, 710, 734, 742, (21.11.02) 786, 836, 844, 864, 873–4, 876–7, 881, 892, 897
Disallowed questions (19.11.02) 487, 496, (21.11.02) 766
Points of order (13.11.02) 23, (14.11.02) 201, (18.11.02) 383–4, (20.11.02) 645–6, 737–8, (21.11.02) 800, 897, 900
Queen's speech (13.11.02) 3, 6
Rulings and statements, Eight minutes rule (20.11.02) 676
Rulings and statements, Ministerial statements (20.11.02) 646
Rulings and statements, Nine minutes rule (19.11.02) 520
Rulings and statements, Oral questions (18.11.02) 345
Rulings and statements, Speeches (18.11.02) 408
Rulings and statements, Twelve minutes rule (14.11.02) 190, (18.11.02) 408
Select Committee motions (18.11.02) 474
Standing order no 24 applications, ASW Steel Mill (18.11.02) 382
Written questions, Dept for Work and Pensions (20.11.02) 645
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Conduct of proceedings (21.11.02) 26wh, 40wh

"Special Grant Report (No 109) on Disposal of Refrigerators"
2ws

Speed limits
Road signs and markings 271w
Urban areas 271w

***Spellar, Rt Hon John**, Minister for Transport, Department for Transport*
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Regional government (19.11.02) 566
Railways, Accidents (15.11.02) 340–4
Questions
Birmingham Relief Road 499–500
Bus services 261w, 496–8
Buses 20w
Commuters, Greater London 264–5w
Exhaust emissions 263–4w
London Underground, Crime 495–6
Official cars, Dept for Transport 266w
Paddington Station 267w
Railway stations, Wokingham 267w
Railways, Safety 263w
Road traffic, Greater London 180w
Roads, Greater London 21w, 266w
Roads, Urban areas 21–2w
Traffic lights 272w
Transport, Finance 493–5
Transport, Infrastructure 267w

Spelman, Mrs Caroline
Questions
Africa, Food supply 2w
Africa, Health 194w
Angola 194–5w
Angola, Exservicemen 194w
Burma, International assistance 248–9w
CDC Capital Partners 199w
Democratic Republic of Congo, Sexual offences 196w
Developing countries, Drugs 250–1w
Developing countries, Education 14–5w, 50–1w
Developing countries, Health services 200w
Eritrea 196–7w
Eritrea, International assistance 196w
Ethiopia 197–8w
Ethiopia, Overseas aid 197w
European Bank for Reconstruction and Development 198w
Overseas aid 200w
Overseas aid, EC enlargement 1w
Zimbabwe, Food aid 251w
Zimbabwe, Overseas aid 53w

Spicer, Sir Michael
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Health services (14.11.02) 215–7
Questions
Army, British citizenship 209–10w
Equitable Life Independent Inquiry 23w
"Road Traffic Penalties Consultation Paper" 248w

Spink, Bob
Debates etc.
Queen's speech (13.11.02) 19–20
Questions
Patients, Foreigners 241w
World class performance programme 12w

Sport England
see English Sports Council

Sports
13w
Finance 171–2w, 228w
Lotto 171w
Schools 146–7w
Young people 11w

Sports competitors
Finance 230w, 350–2

Spring, Mr Richard
Questions
Aviation, Security 177–8w
Council tax 124w

Stability Pact
73w

Staffordshire
Transport 498

Stagecoach Holdings
78w

"Standards of Conduct in the House of Commons"
43ws

Standing Committee on the Convention on the Future of Europe
see Convention on the Future of Europe Standing Committee

Standing order no 24 applications
ASW Steel Mill (18.11.02) 381–2

State earnings related pension scheme
280–1w

Statistics
Floods 288–9w

Steen, Mr Anthony
Questions
Business, Regulation 43w
Licensing laws 10w

Steinberg, Mr Gerry
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Regional government (19.11.02) 565

Stevens Inquiry
see Security Forces Collusion with Loyalist Terrorists Inquiry

Stevenson, Mr George
Questions
Common agricultural policy, Reform 775

Stewart, Mr David
Questions
Diabetes 34w

Strategic Rail Authority
22w, 267–8w
Standards 271–2w

***Straw, Rt Hon Jack**, Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs*
Written Statements
St Andrew's Day 45–6ws
Questions
Entry clearances 47–8w

Street warden scheme
Finance 27–8w

Streeter, Mr Gary
Debates etc.
Navy, Points of order (18.11.02) 383–4
Queen's speech, Regional government (19.11.02) 574, 585–8
Sexual offences (19.11.02) 519
Social security benefits (18.11.02) 377

Stuart, Ms Gisela
Debates etc.
Sexual offences (19.11.02) 511

Students
Fees and charges 148w

Stunell, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
Committee of Selection (21.11.02) 878, 882

Submarines
221w

Sub-Saharan Africa
Developing countries 193w

Sudan
Overseas aid 201–2w

Suicide
278w

Summertime
123w

Supported housing
Housing benefit 154w

Sustainable development
Developing countries 49–50w
Energy supply 111–2w

Sutton Coldfield
Magistrates' courts (21.11.02) 901–8

Swaminarayan Hindu Mission
Petitions 140w

Swayne, Mr Desmond
Debates etc.
Ministerial statement intervention (14.11.02) 157
Queen's speech, Regional government (19.11.02) 533
Questions
BSE, Disease control 290w

Swayne, Mr Desmond—*continued*
Carbon dioxide, Pollution control 123w
Electricity, Power failures 112w
Horticulture Research International 42w
Ivory 289–90w
Speed limits, Urban areas 271w
Students, Fees and charges 148w

Swire, Mr Hugo
Questions
Afghanistan, Overseas aid 16–7w
Livestock, Transport 771
Public transport, Pressure groups 78w
World War II, Military decorations 35w

Switzerland
Banks 186w

Syms, Mr Robert
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Regional government (19.11.02) 557–8, 574, 597–9
Questions
Local government finance 119w

Taiwan
EC external trade 47w

Tapsell, Sir Peter
Debates etc.
Queen's speech (13.11.02) 23
Queen's speech, Economic policy (18.11.02) 396–7

Tax credit
Pensions 276w

Taxation
Company cars 273w
EC action 73w
Official cars 189w
Shipping 80w

Taxis
Greater London 258–9w

Taxpayers
188w

Taylor, Ms Dari
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Regional government (19.11.02) 594–7
Questions
Public appointments, Females 43–4w

Taylor, Mr David
Debates etc.
Queen's speech (13.11.02) 58, 61
Queen's speech, Crime (20.11.02) 738
Queen's speech, Regional government (19.11.02) 525, 546, 569, 588–91, 593
Questions
Business questions 791
Constituencies 121–2w
Livestock, Transport 767
Ministers of religion, Pay 24w
Planning, Reform 631–2

Taylor, Mr Ian
Debates etc.
Sexual offences (19.11.02) 511

Taylor, Mr John
Questions
Aviation 20w, 491
Birmingham Airport 20w

Taylor, Matthew
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Economic policy (18.11.02) 398, 411–21
Questions
Advertising, Treasury 67–8w
Indirect taxation 186–7w
Members, Correspondence 258w

Taylor, Matthew—*continued*
National insurance contributions, Non-payment 189–90w
Office for National Statistics 72w, 275–6w
Private finance initiative 276w
Public Sector Classification Committee 190–1w
Social security benefits, Minimum wage 186w

Taylor, Dr Richard
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Regional government (19.11.02) 571–3

Taylor, Sir Teddy
Debates etc.
Queen's speech (13.11.02) 63, 88–92
Questions
Air pollution, Urban areas 284w

Teachers
Buckinghamshire 60w, 67w
Crimes of violence 61–2w
Pay 63–7w
Training 32–3w

Technology Colleges Trust
Finance 32w

Telecommunications
43ws
Navy 35w

Telecommunications masts
see Aerials

Television
Licensing 169w, 171–2w, 232–4w

10 Downing Street
Air conditioning 254w

Territorial Army
Incentives 38–9w, 222w

Terrorism
Finance 278w
Fire services 637–8
Health services 636

Thailand
Exports 153w
Peace keeping operations 216w

Theatre
Children 98–100w

Thomas, Gareth, (Clwyd West)
Debates etc.
Fire services (14.11.02) 162

Thomas, Mr Gareth, (Harrow West)
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Health services (14.11.02) 175
Questions
Capital allowances 187w
Physical education 356–7

Thomas, Simon
Debates etc.
Members, Points of order (18.11.02) 384
Queen's speech, Economic policy (18.11.02) 410, 433, 443–6
Questions
Civil servants, Business interests 223w
Pesticides 285–6w

Timms, Mr Stephen, Minister of State, E-Commerce and Competitiveness, Dept of Trade and Industry
Written Statements
Telecommunications 43ws
Questions
Broadband 149–50w

Tipping, Mr Paddy
Questions
Meat, Smuggling 769

Tipping of waste
286w

Todd, Mr Mark
Debates etc.
Fire services (14.11.02) 161–2
Local government finance, Derbyshire (14.11.02) 255–6
Queen's speech, Crime (20.11.02) 716–7
Questions
Exservicemen, Radiation exposure 36w
Mortgage Direct 72w

Tolls
Cabinet Office 93w
Dept for Culture Media and Sport 169–70w
Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 40–1w
Dept for International Development 49w
Dept for Transport 79–80w
Dept for Work and Pensions 104w
Dept of Trade and Industry 256–7w
Foreign and Commonwealth Office 45w
House of Commons Commission 148w
Lord Chancellor's Dept 94–5w
Northern Ireland Office 253w
Office of the Deputy Prime Minister 81w, 169w
Office of the Secretary of State for Wales 96w
Roads 492–3
Scotland Office 94w
Treasury 95w

Tonge, Dr Jenny
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Health services (14.11.02) 171, 199, 210, 222, 228–30
Sexual offences (19.11.02) 518
Questions
Adam Smith Institute, Dept for International Development 2–4w

Tourism
Coastal areas 347–50
Marketing 11–2w

Trade competitiveness
Chemicals 150–2w

Traffic lights
272w

Train operating companies
Standards 76w

Training
Armed forces 115–6w
Expenditure 127w
NHS 46ws
Personal and social education 147w
Riot control weapons 219w
Teachers 32–3w

Transport
260–1w
Costs 184–5w
Finance 493–5
Infrastructure 266–7w
Livestock 40w, 766–7, 770–1, 779–80
Queen's speech (19.11.02) 521–616
Radioactive materials 181–2w, 255–6w
Schools 54–5w, 270–1w
Staffordshire 498

Transport Act 2000
Questions
22w

Transsexualism
208w

Travel information
Public transport 77w

Treasury
Advertising 67–8w
Air conditioning 73–4w
Grants 188w
Hacking 74w
Tolls 95w

Tredinnick, Mr David
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Health services (14.11.02) 186–7

Trickett, Jon
Debates etc.
Queen's speech (13.11.02) 40, 75–8

Truancy
Essex 148w

Turner, Mr Andrew
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Crime (20.11.02) 671, 705–6
Questions
Armed forces, Fire services 217–8w
Armed forces, Training 115–6w
Dental services 205w
Fire services, Emergency calls 84–6w
Fire services, Manpower 82–5w
Public transport, Pressure groups 78w
Regional assemblies 633
Revenue support grant, Isle of Wight 86–7w
Rural areas 94w

Turner, Mr Dennis
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Further education (21.11.02) 5wh

Turner, Mr Neil
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Regional government (19.11.02) 573–6

12 Downing Street
Repairs and maintenance 140w

Twelve minutes rule
Rulings and statements (14.11.02) 190, (18.11.02) 408

***Twigg, Mr Stephen**, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Dept for Education and Skills*
Questions
Children in care, Education 58w
Dyslexia 56w
Internet, Dept for Education and Skills 55–6w
Schools, Crimes of violence 59w
Schools, Transport 54–5w
Teachers, Crimes of violence 61–2w

Tyler, Mr Paul
Debates etc.
Queen's speech (13.11.02) 53–4, 58, 60
Queen's speech, Crime (20.11.02) 668, 670
Queen's speech, Regional government (19.11.02) 569–70
Questions
Business questions 130–1, 789–90
Sheep dipping 778–9

Tynan, Mr Bill
Debates etc.
Committee of Selection (21.11.02) 875
Queen's speech, Crime (20.11.02) 695–6
Questions
Aviation, Scotland 488–9
Tourism, Marketing 11–2w

Tyrie, Mr Andrew
Questions
Ministers, Charter flights 18w

Uganda
51w

UK Sport
Finance 171w

Universities
see Higher education

Urban areas
94w
Air pollution 284w
Finance 227–8w
Post offices 126w
Roads 21–2w
Speed limits 271w

USA
Air routes 181w
Climate Change Convention 139w
Diplomatic service 234w

VAT
187w
Churches 25w, 358–9
Mortgages 189w
Musical instruments 23w

Vaz, Mr Keith
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Economic policy (18.11.02) 446–9
Questions
Arrest warrants, EC action 128w
Bishops 136–7w
Business questions 792
Exservicemen, Radiation exposure 36w, 220w
Foreign trade, EC enlargement 255w
Hare Krishna, Religious buildings 226w
India 257–8w
Swaminarayan Hindu Mission, Petitions 140w
Training, Expenditure 127w
Water, Meters 154w
Water companies 154w

Veterinary services
298w
Disciplinary proceedings 167w

Vibration white finger
Compensation 112w

Victims
Crime 641–2

Viggers, Mr Peter
Questions
Armed forces, Health 219w
Civil servants, Pensions 23–4w
Dental services, Gosport 236–7w
Dental services, Pay 237w
Royal Naval Hospital Haslar 222w, 244–5w

Wales
Civil defence 202w

Wales Office
see Office of the Secretary of State for Wales

Walley, Ms Joan
Debates etc.
Fire services (14.11.02) 151–2

Walton Group
Liverpool 25–6w

War pensions
9–10ws

Wareing, Mr Robert N
Debates etc.
Fire services (21.11.02) 898

Warrington
Health services 246w

Warships
223w

Waste disposal
Animal products 39w
Electronic equipment 782
Livestock 290–1w
Meat 40w

Water
Meters 154w

Water charges
Landlords 127w

Water companies
154w

Water supply
167–8w
Developing countries 51–2w, 200–1w

Waterson, Mr Nigel
Questions
Illegal immigrants, East Sussex 130–1w
Meat, Smuggling 767–8

Watkinson, Angela
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Health services (14.11.02) 235–7

Weapons
Iraq 116w

Webb, Mr Steve
Debates etc.
Dept for Work and Pensions, Points of order (20.11.02) 645
Queen's speech (13.11.02) 27
Queen's speech, Economic policy (18.11.02) 385
Social security benefits (18.11.02) 372
Questions
Life expectancy 71w
State earnings related pension scheme 280–1w
Taxation, EC action 73w

Weir, Mr Michael
Debates etc.
Fire services (14.11.02) 153, (21.11.02) 895
Fisheries (21.11.02) 830–1
Questions
Disease control, EC grants and loans 40w
Fisheries, Scotland 287w

Welsh Grand Committee
(14.11.02) 164

West coast railway line
76w

White, Brian
Debates etc.
Queen's speech (13.11.02) 53, 81, 93–6
Questions
Hacking, Cabinet Office 209w
Hacking, Dept for Culture Media and Sport 170w
Hacking, Dept for Education and Skills 57w
Hacking, Dept for Environment Food and Rural Affairs 42w
Hacking, Dept for International Development 199w
Hacking, Dept for Transport 264w
Hacking, Foreign and Commonwealth Office 9w

***White, Brian**—continued*
Hacking, Lord Chancellor's Dept 207w
Hacking, Ministry of Defence 116–7w
Hacking, Treasury 74w

White fish
Quotas 643

***Whitehead, Dr Alan**, Parliamentary Secretary, Dept for Transport Local Government and the Regions*
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Regional government (19.11.02) 526, 557–60
Renewable energy (20.11.02) 756–60
Questions
Waste disposal, Electronic equipment 782

Whittingdale, Mr John
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Education (15.11.02) 330–4
Questions
BBC 169w
BBC, Commercial activities 229–30w
BBC, Finance 229w
BBC News 24 Review 169w
BBC Worldwide, Digital broadcasting 228–31w
Television, Licensing 169w, 172w, 232–4w
Tourism, Coastal areas 349–50

***Wicks, Malcolm**, Parliamentary Secretary, Dept for Work and Pensions*
Written Statements
Social security benefits, Fraud 41–2ws
Questions
Housing benefit 153–4w
Housing benefit, Supported housing 154w
Social security benefits, Expenditure 279w
Social security benefits, Post offices 279–80w

Widdecombe, Rt Hon Ann
Debates etc.
Effala, Madeline (19.11.02) 619–24

Wiggin, Mr Bill
Debates etc.
Queen's speech (13.11.02) 49
Questions
Bovine tuberculosis, Disease control 154w
Livestock, Transport 779
Local government, Standards 86w

Wilkinson, Mr John
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Education (15.11.02) 306–7

Willetts, Mr David
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Health services (14.11.02) 242–6
Social security benefits (18.11.02) 367–70
Questions
Income tax 70w
Working families tax credit 191w

Williams, Rt Hon Alan
Questions
Ministers, Official gifts 17w
Official gifts, Royal family 254w

Williams, Mrs Betty
Questions
Overseas aid, Education 49w

Williams, Hywel
Debates etc.
Social security benefits (18.11.02) 376–7

Williams, Mr Roger
Questions
Bovine tuberculosis 297w
Livestock, Transport 779–80
Pesticides 286w
Poultry meat, Food composition 242–3w

Willis, Mr Phil
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Education (15.11.02) 267–8, 271, 283, 289, 292–300
Questions
Class sizes 28–30w
Education, Assessments 31w
Education, Finance 30–1w
Higher education 142w
Non-teaching staff 31–2w
Qualifications and Curriculum Authority 58–9w
Teachers, Training 32–3w
Technology Colleges Trust, Finance 32w

Wilshire, Mr David
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Economic policy (18.11.02) 398

***Wilson, Mr Brian**, Minister of State for Industry and Energy, Dept of Trade and Industry*
Written Statements
Natural gas, Prices 1ws
Questions
Batteries, Recycling 106–7w
Electricity, Energy supply 109w
Electricity, Power failures 108w, 110–2w
Electricity generation 152w
Energy supply, Sustainable development 111–2w
Hydroelectric power, Scotland 109w
Job creation, Solar power 258w
Liquefied petroleum gas 105–6w
Mining, Industrial diseases 109w
Pneumoconiosis, Compensation 109–10w
Radioactive materials, Transport 255–6w
Renewable energy 153w
Vibration white finger, Compensation 112w

Windsor
Schools 146w

Winnick, David
Debates etc.
Fire services (14.11.02) 154
Queen's speech, Crime (20.11.02) 648–9, 658
Questions
Members, Correspondence 53–4w

Winterton, Ann
Debates etc.
Fisheries (21.11.02) 810–1, 835, 839–44, 854

Winterton, Sir Nicholas
Debates etc.
Business questions intervention (21.11.02) 795
Questions
Business questions 794
Eggs 781–2

***Winterton, Ms Rosie**, Parliamentary Secretary, Lord Chancellor's Dept*
Questions
Correspondence, Lord Chancellor's Dept 207w
Divorce (Religious Marriages) Act 2002 207w
Tolls, Lord Chancellor's Dept 94–5w
Transsexualism 208w

Wishart, Pete
Debates etc.
Committee of Selection (21.11.02) 870–8, 884
Questions
Aviation 490
Business questions 135, 799

Wokingham
Railway stations 267w
Schools 140–1w

Women
see Females

Woodbridge, Jeff
(18.11.02) 475–84

Working families tax credit
191w

Working hours
44–5ws
Junior doctors 238–9w

World Bank
192–3w
Public appointments 191–2w

World class performance programme
12w

World War II
Military decorations 35w

Worthington, Tony
Debates etc.
Queen's speech (13.11.02) 10
Questions
Afghanistan, International assistance 249w
Kenya, Elections 233–4w

Wray, Mr James
Questions
Adoption, Homosexuality 97–8w
Developing countries, Sustainable development 49–50w
Developing countries, Water supply 51–2w, 200–1w
Food, Labelling 291–2w
Mining, Industrial diseases 109w
Mladic, Ratko 45–6w
Overseas aid, Children 198w
Overseas aid, Non-governmental organisations 195w
Schools, Sports 146–7w
Teachers, Crimes of violence 61–2w
Terrorism, Finance 278w
Vibration white finger, Compensation 112w

Wright, Mr Anthony D
Questions
Tourism, Coastal areas 347–8

Wright, David
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Economic policy (18.11.02) 402
Sittings in Westminster Hall
Further education (21.11.02) 36–8wh

Wright, Tony
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Crime (20.11.02) 703–5
Questions
Civil servants, Ethnic groups 503–4
Higher education 643–4

Written questions
Dept for Work and Pensions (20.11.02) 645
Prime Minister 18–9w

Wyatt, Derek
Debates etc.
ASW Steel Mill, Standing order no 24 applications (18.11.02) 381–2
Questions
A249 259w
ASW Sheerness 106w
BBC Worldwide, Digital broadcasting 230w
Bletchley Park, Museums and galleries 230w
Broadband 150w
Broadcasting programmes, Independent producers 231w
Electoral systems, Public participation 360
Millennium Stadium 231w

Wyatt, Derek—continued
Museum of the Moving Image 231–2w
Sports, Lotto 171w
USA, Diplomatic service 234w

Yeo, Mr Tim
Debates etc.
Queen's speech, Economic policy (18.11.02) 465–9

York
Fire stations 124–5w
Magistrates' courts 208w

Young, Sir George
Questions
Business questions 134

Young people
Arts 13–4w
Licensing laws 12w
Sports 11w

Younger-Ross, Richard
Debates etc.
Queen's speech (13.11.02) 66, 103–6
Questions
Thailand, Peace keeping operations 216w

Zimbabwe
Arms trade 9w
Food aid 251w
HIV infection 198w
Overseas aid 53w
Sanctions 9w

CAMBRIDGESHIRE
LIBRARIES